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**THINGS GOD HATES**  
A THIRTEEN LESSON BIBLE STUDY  
BY JEFF S. SMITH



7. To what does the psalmist compare brotherly unity (133:1-3)? Explain. What effect does Christian disunity have on the unbeliever (John 17:11)?

8. What was God trying to communicate to the nation of Israel, when centuries later, he said that he hated Esau (Malachi 1:1-5)? Explain.

9. Why did God say he hated divorce (Malachi 2:10-17)? What is it that is violent about an unjust divorce?

10. How do we provoke God to jealousy (James 4:1-6, First John 2:15-17)?

11. What was the problem with Judah's worship in Isaiah's time (1:10-17)? How do some people replicate it today?

12. What do scoffers say (Second Peter 3:1-4)? What do they willfully forget (5-6)? Why hasn't God commenced Judgment Day yet (7-9)? How do most people treat God's longsuffering (Romans 2:1-6)? Why?

## **INTRODUCTION**

The apparent contradiction is jarring to some people. How could a God of love, who defines his nature and character by that very emotion, hate anything? God loves his creation so much, however, that his divine nature must hate its enemies, especially the evil and error that threaten its spiritual prosperity and hope of spending heaven in eternity. It becomes clear that God's hatred of certain behaviors and attitudes is far from arbitrary, but is instead rooted in his love for goodness and righteousness. Subscribing to his ideals brings us closer to peace and holiness, even if certain of those behaviors must be sacrificed along the way.

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## THINGS GOD HATES (13) REVIEW

1. By what law is boasting excluded (Romans 3:27-28)? What effect does an expression of pride have upon others (Galatians 5:25-26, Romans 12:16)?
2. Why do people tell lies or work deceptions? What authority does the Bible give to lie under certain circumstances (Ephesians 4:25-30)?
3. The New Testament describes certain selfish acts that are tantamount to murder. List them (Matthew 5:21-26, Galatians 5:13-15, First John 3:10-23).
4. What kind of heart does this abominable person have (Proverbs 6:14, Romans 3:10-18)? Why is not acceptable that one should confine himself to imagining evil (Hebrews 4:11-12, Romans 2:16)? What are some examples?

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5. The abominable feet are hasty. What is the danger in taking action because of capriciousness or a lack of thoughtful consideration (see Proverbs 4:26, 18:13; James 3:7-10, Titus 1:7)?
6. The prohibition against false witnesses always includes the word "neighbor." What might this imply (Ephesians 4:25, James 4:11-12)? How might one become guilty of false witness at school? At work?

1. What was it about the Exodus pilgrims that God loathed (First Corinthians 10:1-12)? Why could they not enter Canaan (Hebrews 3:19)?

2. What causes modern Christians to doubt or complain?

3. What was it that God hated in Sodom? What was he willing to do for the sake of ten righteous people? What did he do to save Lot?

4. How does he reach out his hand to this lost and dying world (John 3:16, First Timothy 2:3-6)? Why doesn't he just validate everybody and shut Hell down (Second Thessalonians 1:6-10, 2:9-12; Hebrews 6:17-18)?

5. What do scoffers say (Second Peter 3:1-4)? What do they willfully forget (5-6)? Why hasn't God commenced Judgment Day yet (7-9)?

6. How do most people treat God's longsuffering (Romans 2:1-6)? Why?

7. What does God love more than anything (First John 4:7-19)?

## THINGS GOD HATES (1) HAUGHTY EYES

“There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him” (Proverbs 6:16).

The proverbs of King Solomon were addressed to young men who would seem to be likely to fall into at least some behaviors that God finds detestable. Youthful vigor is sometimes sullied by a maddening lack of self-control and the young man finds himself struggling to contain his passions and promote his faith. It is not that God hates him, but that God hates some of his actions because they are so counterproductive to the divinely higher purpose. A person who is enslaved to his own self-interest will injure others and unwittingly damage his own prospects by inviting reprisals upon his own guilty head.

The king's list of infamy is even introduced with a similar theme. “A worthless person, a wicked man, goes about with crooked speech, winks with his eyes, signals with his feet, points with his finger, with perverted heart devises evil, continually sowing discord; therefore calamity will come upon him suddenly; in a moment he will be broken beyond healing” (12-15).

The seven abominations that Solomon lists here include “haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers” (16-19).

Leaving the rest until later, Solomon reasons first that God hates haughty eyes, or “a proud look” (KJV, NKJV)—“the spirit that makes one overestimate himself and underestimate others” (THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE).

The haughty eyes are characterized by looking down one's nose at others, ignoring his own shortcomings while magnifying those of his neighbor. The proud look announces a superior self-perception, rooted perhaps in a dozen different sources of hubris—wealth, might, attractiveness, education, breeding, heredity, even religious attainment. That look, however, is clear evidence of moral inferiority, for God values humility far beyond self-aggrandizement.

Haughty eyes are divisive and the proud look isolates and insulates the beholder from people he might have helped and been helped by. God chooses to thwart the hollow discernment of the proud, to supply victory to the meek and mournful, to illuminate the simple and uneducated. “God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God” (First Corinthians 1:28-29).

Perhaps God might hate those haughty eyes most because they can even be turned against him—denying his existence, his goodness and his power.

1. Consider Proverbs 6:12-15. Why do people sometimes wink?
  
2. Describe something you are proud of and how it could cause dissension and hurt feelings if you don't control it.
  
3. By what law is boasting excluded (Romans 3:27-28)? Explain.
  
4. What effect does an expression of pride have upon others—our neighbors, brethren, targets of evangelism, etc. (Galatians 5:25-26, Romans 12:16, First Timothy 2:9-10)?
  
5. It is bitterly ironic that the things closest to the proud man are often the hardest to see. How does pride affect his judgment (Matthew 7:1-5)?
  
6. What is the behavior of an accomplished person, who is confident without becoming arrogant (see Luke 14:7-14, Matthew 6:2-4, Proverbs 27:2, First Timothy 6:17)?
  
7. How did Diotrephes exercise his haughty eyes (Third John 9-11)? How about the Pharisees (John 7:45-52)?

## THINGS GOD HATES (12) THE LOST GENERATION

God inspired the psalmist to write, “For forty years I loathed that generation and said, ‘They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways’” (95:10).

The reference, of course, is to the original generation of pilgrims that departed Egypt, but never quite made it to Canaan because of their lack of faith (see Hebrews 3:16-4:10). They became the original lost generation that so grieved God that they were utterly consumed by the yawning wilderness (NKJV). “It is a people that do err in their hearts, and they do not approve, acknowledge, or regard My ways” (Amplified Bible).

Perhaps, though, it is not so much *the people* whom God hates, but *the loss itself*. God so hated the loss of a human soul that he was willing to preserve Sodom and Gomorrah for the sake of 10 righteous souls in their borders. Unable to find even that many, he still preserved the willing family of Lot. The very mission of his son, Jesus Christ, is absolute proof of God’s affection for sinful humanity, his willingness to meet the prodigal with mercy (Luke 15:11-32), and to be patient with the prospective redeemed (see Romans 2:1-10, John 3:16-21, Romans 5:6-11).

God hates the loss—the eternal banishment of even one human soul which he created. “This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (First Timothy 2:3-4). His equivalent hatred for sin, however, will not permit him merely to overlook iniquity and allow people to bring sinful lives into the purity of Heaven. The quandary is solved through the gospel that encourages restoration and righteousness, so that all the souls whom God loves might choose a more lovable path (Matthew 1:21).

God was patient with the antediluvians, the generation of Lot and even the pilgrims whom he fed and protected while their complaining only grew louder. God is patient today as well, giving sinners multiple opportunities to respond to the gospel invitation, giving disciples time to repent of their shortcomings and backsliding (see Revelation 2:21). In the same way, however, that he was grieved and disgusted by the lost generation in the wilderness, we have the potential to reject him so thoroughly that he cannot save us from ourselves. “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (Second Peter 3:9).

Although Jehovah is love personified—or perhaps because of it—he must hate the things that destroy man. Good and evil are not arbitrarily discerned, but rather are judged according to their potential to enrich or deflate the prospects of mankind to approach God and enter into eternal life. The key is to learn to hate the same things that he hates.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What would come close to being our “sacred assembly” (Acts 20:7-11, First Corinthians 11:17-34, 16:1-4)?
2. What is meant by worship that is in spirit and in truth (John 4:19-24)? What interferes with the spirit part (Malachi 1:13)? What interferes with the truth part (Matthew 15:7-9)?
3. Why shouldn't God just accept whatever we throw at him, as long as we call it worship (Matthew 28:18-20, Ephesians 5:10, 15-17)?
4. What was the problem with Judah's worship in Isaiah's time (1:10-17)? How do some people replicate it today?
5. What was the problem in Amos's time (5:21-27)? What did he recommend? What is the parallel to Christ's teaching (Matthew 23:23)?
6. What would cause people to be lukewarm about faith and worship (Revelation 3:15-16, Second Peter 3:1-9)?

## THINGS GOD HATES (2) A LYING TONGUE

God hates deception—“Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who act faithfully are his delight” (Proverbs 12:22).

Few people are accomplished liars. In fact, most people are so uncomfortable telling lies that they unwittingly communicate nonverbal cues whenever they stray from the truth. Skilled jurists and other judges of character can detect the darting eyes, clearing throat and other signals that a lie is being told.

At the same time, most people are guilty of lying or causing deception at least occasionally. Usually, they are determined to be small lies, told for the greater good or to save someone's feelings, hardly ever under oath and rarely even meriting such a terrible word as lie.

Except that every lie and deception is still a falsehood, the product of a lying tongue, which God hates without reservation or accommodation.

Deception dates back as far as the Garden of Eden, where God had planted truth, even in his warnings against temptation. Satan slithered along and assured Eve that she would not surely die just for eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge. His forked tongue and lying lips persuaded her to disobey God and she discovered how bitter a lie can taste when it goes down.

The devil, after all, is the father of lies, adopting a quiver full of children who cannot bear to hear the words of Christ for they hate his moral light and truth (see John 8:43-44).

Most lying is about self-preservation, protecting one's reputation, his fortune, his freedom, his peaceful existence. Even lies that are told to save the feelings of another are often really rooted in a desire to avoid the wrath of an offended neighbor.

Yet, it is the religious lie that holds the power to destroy millions of gullible souls. God, who hates a lying tongue, surely finds false doctrine to be an utter abomination. Many people simply prefer a convenient lie that essentially validates current behavior rather than a truth that might cause a seismic shift in their habits (see Second Thessalonians 2:1-12).

Jesus reserves eternal torment for those who promote or practice lies. “But as for ... all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death ... Blessed are those who wash their robes, R64 so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood” (Revelation 21:8, 22:14-15).

Where the lie looks like an easy escape hatch, it always turns out to be a black hole sooner or later.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is it that makes Satan the father of lies (John 8:43-44, Genesis 3:1-7, Matthew 4:1-11)?
2. Why do people tell lies or work deceptions?
3. What authority does the Bible give a Christian to lie under certain circumstances (Ephesians 4:25-30)? When persecuted (Revelation 2:10)? When threatened by criminals? When asked how you like your wife's new aerodynamic, Italian haircut?
4. What did your mama teach you about lying?
5. How did Samuel figure out that King Saul was lying (First Samuel 15:1-14)? What did Moses warn (Numbers 32:23)?
6. Where lying lips are very obvious, sometimes people live the lies much more subtly. How does the apostle John explain this more pervasive problem (First John 1:8-10, 2:1-6, 3:4-10)?

## THINGS GOD HATES (11) INSINCERE WORSHIP

Responding to the curiosity of a Samaritan woman, Jesus Christ stated that, "the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:23-24).

Throughout history, some people have worshiped God only by compulsion, others with ulterior motives and still more with a distracted or insincere mindset.

As far back as the time of Isaiah, God's people were burdened with complacency regarding their worship, which the Lord refused to accept. "What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations—I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood" (1:11-15).

Their worship was not only insincere, but it was completely inconsistent with the general conduct of their lives. They lived daily for the devil and came around on Saturday to throw bones at the Lord. This was neither spirit nor truth and God was not required to accept their worship, even if it followed the proper motions, because without the heart, no amount of proper method will suffice (see First Corinthians 13:1-3, Matthew 15:7-9).

Three centuries later, both Israel and Judah had fallen to their enemies and only a tiny remnant of the nation had returned to rebuild. Even then, God complained through Malachi that worship had slipped over into vanity. "But you say, 'What a weariness this is,' and you snort at it, says the Lord of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the Lord. Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished" (1:13-14).

Without such prophetic pronouncements today, the New Testament must suffice to warn us when we are drifting in either spirit or truth. Without attention to our method and our attitude, we are sure to end up under the same condemnation—inconsistent, hypocritical, insincere. God loathes worship that is compelled or disingenuous, even that which is merely lukewarm (Revelation 3:15-16).

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. On what basis did Jehovah claim exclusive rights to Israel's loyalty (Exodus 20:1-7)? Is there something similar that would give him the same right to the Christian's (Romans 6:16-21)?
2. How did Israel learn to worship idols (Exodus 32:1-6, First Samuel 8:1-8, First Kings 11:1-8)?
3. Explain what is meant when God is called "Jealous" (Exodus 34:14, Deuteronomy 4:24, 32:21; Nahum 1:2).
4. How do we provoke God to jealousy (James 4:1-6, First John 2:15-17)?
5. How does money become an idol (Matthew 6:19-24, First Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19; Ephesians 5:3-5, Colossians 3:5, Proverbs 23:4)?
6. How might the statues and portraits in Catholicism be compared to idolatry?
7. What other things become idols (Second Timothy 3:1-5)? Be specific!
8. How do we go about fleeing idolatry (First John 5:21)?

## THINGS GOD HATES (3) HANDS THAT SHED INNOCENT BLOOD

It seems that Cain was the first man whose hands shed innocent blood—that of his faithful brother, Abel.

Cain envied the approval that his brother secured from God by worshipping him by faith, where Cain had fallen short. "So Cain was very angry, and his face fell ... Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him" (Genesis 4:5, 8).

For introducing the world to murder, God banished Cain from his home and made him a fugitive in the earth. "The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground," the Lord told him (10). God instantly hated the "hands that shed innocent blood" (Proverbs 6:16-17).

When the time came to institute a law for the newly independent nation of Israel, murder was obviously prohibited. "Thou shalt not kill," read the Authorized Version, but newer translations make clear that it is murder in particular which God sought to condemn. Killing animals for food or sacrifice, killing convicted criminals, even killing in war found limited justification, but the cold-blooded murder of an innocent person was strictly forbidden.

The Old Testament, however, is filled with tales of murdered innocents. Whether because of greed, envy, anger, impetuosity or some other reason, men found reasons to murder others. As the New Testament fulfilled and replaced the Law of Moses, the offensiveness of murder became even more obvious, yet Jesus chose to expand it beyond the simple act of killing. Unreasonable anger, hateful words and even apathy became tantamount to murder. "For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous" (First John 3:11-12).

Most ominously, the Law of Moses protected innocent human life all the way down to the womb. "When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out, but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined, as the woman's husband shall impose on him, and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life" (Exodus 21:22-23).

The implication for the modern practice of aborting unwanted pregnancies is terrifying. God recognized human life in its developing stages, going so far as to prescribe swift punishment for one who destroyed it. Today, millions of unborn human lives are snuffed out every year as medical hands shed the most innocent blood of all.

1. Before Cain killed his brother, God identified what he needed to do to get over his disappointment. What did God recommend (Genesis 4:1-7; see also Mark 7:20-23)? What similar threats are crouching at people's doors today and sometimes become the cause of murders?

2. What was Cain's fate (Genesis 4:8-16)? What might it have been later (Genesis 9:4-6)? Does God also hate the hands that participate in legal capital punishment (Romans 13:1-7)? Explain.

3. Murder is so obviously sinful that it rarely even merits a sermon treatment these days. The New Testament, however, describes certain selfish acts that are tantamount to murder. List them below.

- Matthew 5:21-26:
- Galatians 5:13-15:
- First John 3:15:
- First John 3:10-12, 17-23:

4. The phrasing of this condemnation—of “hands that shed innocent blood”—is interesting, because it is broad enough to include human life that depends upon the flow of blood, but which has not yet been born. How did King David describe God's relationship with the unborn (Psalm 139:13-16)?

5. How did God show that he hates even the hands that shed unborn, innocent blood (Exodus 21:22-23)? Why do people today do it anyway?

## THINGS GOD HATES (10) IDOLATRY

Our God is a jealous God, and perhaps surprisingly, that is all right.

Not all right as in okay, but all right as in completely correct. Jealousy is only proper when it is sinful to share something. Just as it is wrong for a man to share his wife's romantic affections with someone else, so it would be wrong for God to watch idly as his creatures and people turned to other gods and to demons and devils (First Corinthians 7:2-4, Proverbs 5:15-23).

The Ten Commandments began with a warning against idolatry: “And God spoke all these words, saying, ‘I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God’” (Exodus 20:1-5).

Even memories of the first Passover night and passage through the parted Red Sea proved insufficient to prevent the Hebrews from falling into idolatry. They drank water from a rock, ate manna from heaven and still imitated the Canaanites in adopting false gods, deities made from metal and trees, with no life or power within them.

“You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way, for every abominable thing that the Lord hates they have done for their gods, for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods. ... And you shall not set up a pillar, which the Lord your God hates” (Deuteronomy 12:31, 16:22).

It was idolatry that became the ground for Jehovah's divorce from both Israel and her little sister, Judah. “How can I pardon you? Your children have forsaken me and have sworn by those who are no gods. When I fed them to the full, they committed adultery and trooped to the houses of whores” (Jeremiah 5:7). “The children gather wood, the fathers kindle fire, and the women knead dough, to make cakes for the queen of heaven. And they pour out drink offerings to other gods, to provoke me to anger” (7:18).

Idolatry greatly declined after the remnant returned to rebuild Jerusalem, but a new and subtler form also began to develop—an idolatry devoted to money, possessions, pleasure and even self (Matthew 6:19-24, Second Timothy 3:2-4). Such things become idols the moment they begin to nudge God off the throne of a believer's heart. God will not share space or time with a demon, instead vacating the spirit and leaving it void until repentance invites him to return and to be restored to exclusive glory there.

1. Read Malachi 2:10-17. How is God witness in our marriages?
  
2. Why did God say he hated divorce? What is it that is violent about an unjust divorce?
  
3. In the pattern of Adam and Eve, what were the three aspects of God's uniting them (Genesis 2:18-24, Matthew 19:1-9, Romans 7:1-3)?
  - 
  - 
  -
  
4. What did Moses's certificate provide (Deuteronomy 24:1-4)? Why?
  
5. What things are frequently grounds for divorces today? What ground(s) did Christ designate as valid (Matthew 5:31-32)? Who may remarry?
  
6. What is the danger of an "unscriptural divorce"? What are separated spouses required to do (First Corinthians 7:10-11)?
  
7. How can couples avoid divorcement (Ephesians 5:25-33)?

## THINGS GOD HATES (4)

### A HEART THAT DEVISES WICKED PLANS

Among the seven abominable things that the writer of Proverbs identifies is "a heart that devises wicked plans" (6:18).

And that really gets to the source of the problem. Sin is impossible unless the sinner has a heart for it, and that reveals something very personal and disturbing about him. It suggests that even when his behavior seems harmless enough, he might yet be guilty of sin on a much deeper level—at the heart and thus in the mind where our character and identity are made plain before an omniscient God who cannot be deceived by pretenses toward religion and halfhearted attempts at appeasing our neighbors (Micah 2:1).

A heart that devises wicked plans constantly contemplates the ways in which he might gain advantage over another—whether it be violently, sexually, financially, selfishly or dishonestly. He fantasizes about his conquests, about committing heinous acts with impunity and, therefore, he has a problem even if he never lifts a finger to execute what his mind has imagined.

Elsewhere, the book warns, "Do not eat the bread of a miser, Nor desire his delicacies; For as he thinks in his heart, so is he. 'Eat and drink!' he says to you, But his heart is not with you. The morsel you have eaten, you will vomit up, And waste your pleasant words" (Proverbs 23:6-8). Here is the man whose outward actions do not match his inward thoughts.

Truly, this is a heart condition and "What comes out of a person is what defiles him," for evil proceeds from a heart that is infected with carnal yearning and dangerous to any who pass nearby (Mark 7:14-23). Yet even the most seasoned disciple is continuing to struggle against some passion which has proven to be a stubborn squatter in his otherwise pristine heart. The key is to maintain the process of eviction, never getting comfortable with the presence of such an unwelcome intruder, always working toward his removal (see Hebrews 12:4).

Often, our eyes betray the secrets of our hearts. They sparkle, dart, leer and linger over the things that we privately contemplate. They covet and lust and pierce without a word, exposing our true intentions. Jesus told his audience that, "The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness" (Matthew 6:22-23)!

His own heart was pure, however—free from enslavement to those carnal dictates that bring so much force against us (see John 14:30, Hebrews 4:14-16). We can learn from his daily and ultimate victories how to chase away our evil contemplations and come away with hearts made pure for discipleship and glory (Matthew 11:28-30).

1. What kind of heart does this abominable person have (Proverbs 6:14)? Explain (Romans 3:10-18).

2. Why is not acceptable that one should confine himself to imagining evil so long as he stops short of actually doing it (Hebrews 4:11-12, Romans 2:16)? What are some examples of such things?

3. How did God deal with such people in Micah's time (2:1-5; see also Luke 16:19-31)?

4. Moses warned, "But if you will not do so, behold, you have sinned against the Lord, and be sure your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23). How do secret sins sometimes escape?

5. What sources of corruption most concerned the Pharisees and scribes (Mark 7:1-5)? How did Jesus expose their hypocrisy and find a worse source of perversion (Mark 7:14-23)?

6. How does a disciple keep from getting discouraged about the stubborn shortcomings he struggles to overcome (Hebrews 10:35-39, 12:4)?

## THINGS GOD HATES (9) DIVORCE

"I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel" in Malachi chapter two, verse 16 (NIV).

Malachi prophesied at the very end of the period of Old Testament revelation and apparently it had become a time of great spiritual shallowness. Although idolatry had been largely eradicated, the hearts of the people were a long way from a full reunion with the Lord God.

Insincere worship, spiritual shortcuts and moral treachery had become the norm in a partially reconstituted nation and God was no more satisfied than when the people fornicated with every Canaanite god they could find.

"And this second thing you do. You cover the Lord's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. But you say, 'Why does he not?' Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant" (2:13-14).

Two dozen centuries have passed and the problem persists, just as it did in the time of Jesus, who sought to establish his own teaching on marriage, divorce and remarriage. God's hatred for "putting away" was only revisited by the Savior who pleaded with his disciples to be faithful to the covenants by which God joined them to the wives of their youth. "Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union" (Malachi 2:15)?

We learn from the Son that God merely permitted these divorces under the Law of Moses, but that, "from the beginning it was not so" (Matthew 19:8). The marriage of Adam to Eve was designed to form a pattern and such unions were intended to be permanent as long as both mates lived. First century rabbis interpreted the Law—specifically the so-called Mosaic Allowance of Deuteronomy 24:1-4—differently and the result was a growing acceptance of a man putting away his wife for just any cause. The divorced woman could hardly support herself and quickly remarried to find a new home, bringing shame and disorder upon God's people.

This Jesus intended to reform by restoring his church's practice to the Eden ideal—one man for one woman for life. "And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery" (Matthew 19:9). God proved that he still hates divorce.

Modern man, however, does not, and he has invented numerous scenarios by which he can evade the teaching of Christ and enjoy the curse of putting away without cause, often resulting in the formation of a new, but unscriptural, union with somebody else. Children are shuffled about and raised by physical strangers and the church is divided by its response to the accommodating error. It is no wonder that God hates divorce. If only we did.

1. Contrast Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25:24-28).

2. What caused animosity between them (Genesis 25:28, 29-34, 27:1-45)?

3. Did God hate Esau because of these actions (see also Hebrews 12:14-17)?

4. What was God trying to communicate to the nation of Israel, when centuries later, he said that he hated Esau (Malachi 1:1-5)? Was personal hatred for Esau the man even the point? Explain.

5. God's hatred for Esau—really his favoring Israel over Edom—is raised as evidence of Israel's continued potential for salvation in Romans 9:1-13. What blessings did Israel enjoy, that should have led them to Christ (4-5)?

6. How does one become a child of promise then (John 3:1-5, Galatians 3:26-4:7)? Where is God's sovereignty in the selection (Ephesians 1:3-14)?

## THINGS GOD HATES (5) FEET THAT HASTEN TO EVIL

“There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him,” and one of them is “feet that make haste to run to evil.”

Some people simply drool over the potential to engage in wicked behavior. Their appetite for sin is insatiable and their feet hasten to take them wherever sexual immorality, substance abuse, gossip or covetousness can be enjoyed. It is not that their feet are defective, but that they are enslaved to a misguided, carnal mind, sending signals of desire to appendages that cannot independently resist.

Paul warned the Ephesian saints, “Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ” (4:17-20)!

Feet that hasten to evil are calloused by the experience and insensitive to guilt, rebuke and redirection. Sensuality, greed and impurity are addictive pastimes and it becomes even more difficult to keep one's feet away from them.

Following the figurative illustration even further, Jesus counseled his disciples to take great lengths to separate themselves from sinful indulgence. “And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire” (Matthew 18:8).

Feet, of course, are not really the problem—they are being driven by a heart bent on doing wrong. “Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes” (Romans 3:15-18).

A lack of godly fear will permit your feet to take you in all kinds of dangerous directions and sometimes more quickly than you can react. After all, the abomination surrounds feet that hasten to evil. So many sins, especially of the tongue, are the result of thoughtlessness and impatience (see James 1:19-21). People say things without taking time to think and regret words they can never reclaim. Capriciousness carries them into sin before they know what is happening. So Paul tells Timothy, “Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure” (First Timothy 5:22).

The New Testament thus recommends a lifestyle that conflicts with modern whimsy—one that is thoughtful, patient and capable of considering consequences before taking dangerous leaps.

1. Why do you think the inspired writer chose to focus on feet as an abomination—that is, what do feet represent to our thinking?
  
2. How would you go about applying the wisdom of Christ in Matthew 18:7-9 (see also Mark 8:34)?
  
3. What is the difference between walking by faith and walking by sight (Second Corinthians 5:6-9; see also 4:18, Psalm 31:8, 119:101)?
  
4. With what should we cover, protect and prepare our feet (Ephesians 6:15)? Explain (see Romans 10:14-17, Matthew 28:18-20, Matthew 4:4).
  
5. The abominable feet are hasty. What is the danger in taking action because of capriciousness or a lack of thoughtful consideration (see Proverbs 4:26, 18:13; James 3:7-10, Titus 1:7)?
  
6. What if our feet follow the wrong paths? What does the Bible identify as a chief reason that some people go astray (see Proverbs 1:10-19, Psalm 1:1)?

## THINGS GOD HATES (8) ESAU

Poor Esau.

He lost his blessing and sold his birthright and for no apparent reason, the prophet Malachi wrote that God hated him (1:1-5). Really? But why?

God, we find, hates more than just the six or seven things described in Proverbs chapter six. He remains, however, the God of love, and it really isn't all that difficult to understand how love requires hate. The love of man and of good depends upon animosity toward things that would destroy the object of love.

But why hate Esau?

The answer is more in the language than in any arbitrary dislike for this ancient character.

Esau joins the Bible stage in Genesis 25, born to Isaac and Rebekah along with his slightly younger twin brother, Jacob. Their brotherhood was troubled, even from the womb, where Jacob and Esau struggled with each other. God explained to Rebekah, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger" (verse 23).

Jacob, although younger, was able to secure his brother's birthright and his father's blessing, in part because Rebekah favored him over Esau and manipulated events toward his benefit. Esau learned how appropriately Jacob was named—"Usurper," it means. "Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him, and Esau said to himself, 'The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob'" (Genesis 27:41).

Jacob and Esau were later reunited because of the unexpected generosity and grace of the older brother, who had become the patriarch of the nation of Edom (Genesis 32:1-21). It is Edom that is under consideration in Malachi's prophecy, simply as evidence that God had selected Israel instead and favored that nation over Edom.

To our ears, hate is an absolute emotion, but in the Bible tongue, it had more the connotation of loving something or someone less than another (Luke 14:26). God did not arbitrarily choose to be bitter toward poor Esau, but recognizing the kind of men they would become, God selected Jacob to carry forward the germ of fellowship and hope of redemption.

"And not only so, but also when Rebecca had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call—she was told, 'The older will serve the younger.' As it is written, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated'" (Romans 9:10-13).

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. To what does the psalmist compare brotherly unity (133:1-3)? What do you think he means to imply?
2. When might discord be somewhat justified (Jude 3, First Corinthians 11:18-19, First John 2:19)?
3. How do people sometimes sow discord among brethren (Second Corinthians 12:20, Galatians 5:15, Second Timothy 2:18, Jeremiah 20:10)? Why do people sow discord (cf. Acts 23:6)?
4. How did Diotrephes sow discord among his brethren (Third John 9-11)? What does the modern Diotrephes do?
5. What effect does Christian disunity have on the unbeliever (John 17:11)?
6. The New Testament proposes a cure for unnecessary discord. Describe it (Romans 12:10, Hebrews 13:1, James 3:17, First Peter 1:22, 3:8).
7. What must the church do with one who won't repent of sowing discord (Romans 16:17-18 and Titus 3:9-11)?

## THINGS GOD HATES (6) A FALSE WITNESS WHO LIES

The sixth thing that the Lord despises is “a false witness who breathes out lies” (Proverbs 6:19).

One must take great care when pronouncing that God hates something; one must be absolutely certain that such is the case and that he is not merely adding force to his own prejudices. A false witness, however, is almost universally loathed, and more importantly, Scripture is clearly against him and all his motivations and endeavors.

The ninth commandment of the Mosaic Decalogue forbade bearing false witness against one's neighbor, a description that Jesus clarified to include everyone with whom one comes into contact (Exodus 20:16, Luke 10:29-37). His Golden Rule—do unto others as you would have them to do unto you—certainly precludes negative false witness as well (Matthew 7:12; see also Proverbs 25:18).

Indeed, every judicial system is founded upon the expectation of honesty and fairness toward the accused. Lying witnesses cause justice to be miscarried, the innocent to be condemned and the wicked to be acquitted. “Whoever speaks the truth gives honest evidence, but a false witness utters deceit” (Proverbs 12:17). God, who generally seems to wait until Judgment Day to right such wrongs, is the final arbiter against every witness who lies.

Why do some witnesses lie? Some do it for financial gain—they are hired mercenaries like the men who wrongly accused Jesus and Stephen of blasphemies that never even entered their hearts. Others lie for personal advancement, hoping to climb higher upon the corpses of the condemned (Luke 3:14). Some like the attention that comes from making a dramatic outcry and are ready to accuse anyone in a vulnerable class (Acts 21:27-30).

The Law of Moses prescribed a fitting penalty for false testimony: “The judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. And the rest shall hear and fear, and shall never again commit any such evil among you” (Deuteronomy 19:18-20).

False witness, of course, is not confined to the courtroom witness box. Any false accusation against another will do, regardless of the circumstances and place—the playground, classroom, job site, etc. One bears false witness when he suggests that someone else is guilty of something that he isn't. Christians even bear false witness sometimes, hoping to destroy a rival in debate by erecting a straw man of fake arguments to dismantle.

False witness shows up in documents and forms by which a person inflates his credentials or minimizes his obligations. When one signs his name and attests to lies, he is guilty of the same sin.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Clearly, it is wrong to bear false witness against your neighbor, but what would be wrong with doing it *for* him (Exodus 23:6-8, Proverbs 14:5)?
2. Be as honest here as you can be: Can you think of a circumstance where you might be tempted to bear false witness? If so, tell us. If not, reread the first part of the question and try again.
3. The prohibition against false witnesses always includes the word “neighbor.” What might this imply (Ephesians 4:25, James 4:11-12)?
4. How did false witnesses come into play during the trials of Jesus and Stephen (Mark 14:53-60, Acts 6:9-15)?
5. How might one become guilty of false witness at school? At work?
6. How is a false witness punished (Proverbs 19:5,9; Revelation 21:27)?
7. How do Christians sometimes use false testimony to further a pious cause?

## THINGS GOD HATES (7) ONE WHO SOWS DISCORD

Proverbs chapter six describes a half-dozen things that the Lord hates, actually seven things which are abominable to him.

These are not the famous “seven deadly sins” of more recent human origin, but the Solomonic catalog of vile works, which culminates with “one who sows discord among brothers” (verse 19).

There have always been people who enjoy watching a fight, who try to stir up trouble between others for the sake of the spectacle. He whispers in one friend’s ear and the other’s and before long, those two friends are at odds and the instigator is entertained by it all.

The world is burdened with enough naturally-occurring discord without someone introducing it to brethren—people who ought to know better, but because of pride, emotions and hurt feelings, choose to misbehave anyway.

Where Proverbs six might have focused upon brethren of the Hebrew nation, the disciples of Christ are more likely to associate this warning with fellow members of the church. Certainly, there are those within and without the body of Christ who enjoy sowing discord and stirring up trouble among the brethren.

The scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees were always trying to incite the Lord’s disciples against him by cornering him with loaded questions (see Matthew 12:13). Their interest was not so much in truth as it was in destroying a rival. The early church found that converting a Pharisee to Christ did not necessarily cure this impulse; the infamous Judaizing teachers arose to trouble the church by insisting that Gentile converts be circumcised (Acts 15:5). Paul warned some of these Gentiles that, “there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ” (Galatians 1:7).

Diotrephes sowed discord in the church where he sought personal preeminence (Third John 9-11); Euodia and Syntyche created their own discord, being not “of the same mind in the Lord” (Philippians 4:2-3).

Psalm 133:1 says, “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity” but there are few things worse when they are fractured and furious at one another. Whether confined to a single congregation or spread over many miles, such disunity is a shame before the world (John 17:11). “For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another” (Galatians 5:14-15).

Discord is sown through doctrinal error, personality clashes, gossip, rivalries and meaningless disagreements wherein someone should yield but pride will not permit it. “It is honorable for a man to stop striving, Since any fool can start a quarrel” (Proverbs 20:3). Christian infighting is abominable and the person who sows the discord is detestable in the sight of God.