

Love vs. Hate: It's a Choice

Why love and hate aren't just feelings, and how our choices shape our thoughts, emotions, and actions

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

JOHN 13:34

AT A GLANCE

BIG IDEA	Love and hate are not mainly emotions. They are choices, and those choices shape what we feel, what we think, and how we act. Jesus commands us to choose love.
SCRIPTURE	1 Corinthians 13:4-7 • John 13:34-35 • 1 John 3:15-18; 4:19-21 • Matthew 5:43-44 • Romans 12:9-21
LENGTH	About 20 to 25 minutes
BEST FOR	Middle school and high school
YOU WILL NEED	Bibles and a whiteboard with two columns: <i>Love</i> and <i>Hate</i>

Start here: can you command a feeling?

Ask: "Can someone order you to feel happy? Or to stop being scared?" Not really. Feelings come and go. So here's a puzzle: Jesus *commands* us to love one another (John 13:34), even to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44). How can He command something if love is just a feeling?

The answer: in the Bible, love is not mainly an emotion. Neither is hate. **They are choices.** And those choices set off a chain reaction in our emotions, our thoughts, and our actions.

1 Choices shape our emotions

When we choose love or hate, certain feelings tend to follow:

CHOOSING LOVE BRINGS	CHOOSING HATE BRINGS
Hope	Fear
Gentleness	Anger
A desire to help	A sense of injury and offense

John says, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). Hate keeps us afraid, angry, and always feeling wronged.

2 Choices shape our thoughts

LOVE THINKS OF OTHERS WITH

Closeness, like a teammate

Connection

Peace

Favor and respect

HATE THINKS OF OTHERS WITH

Bitter hostility, like an enemy

Animosity

Hostility

Contempt

What we choose about people changes how we see them. Choose love, and you start noticing their good. Choose hate, and you only see their faults.

3 Choices shape our actions

Paul's famous description of love in 1 Corinthians 13 is almost entirely about actions. Here is love, side by side with its opposite:

LOVE IS / DOES

Patient

Kind

Content

Secure (doesn't show off)

Humble

Considerate

Unselfish

Gentle

Forgiving

Rejoices in the truth

Protects

Trusts

Hopes

Perseveres

HATE IS / DOES

Easily irritated

Cruel

Envious

Arrogant

Proud and boastful

Rude

Self-seeking

Easily angered, even violent

Bitter, keeping a record of wrongs

Delights in evil

Harms

Deceives

Discourages

Gives up

"[Love] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." 1 CORINTHIANS 13:7

BACKGROUND FOR THE LEADER

The New Testament usually uses the Greek word *agapē* for this kind of love: a self-giving love that chooses the good of the other person, whether or not it is returned. It is the word for God's love (John 3:16). Also note that Scripture does tell us to "abhor what is evil" (Romans 12:9). Hating sin and injustice is right. What Jesus forbids is hating *people*.

4 Why it matters so much

John doesn't soften this: "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer" (1 John 3:15). He also says, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar" (1 John 4:20). How we treat people shows whether God's love is really in us.

And Jesus said our love would be the way the world recognizes us: "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

How can we choose love?

We don't do it on our own. "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). When we remember how much God has loved and forgiven us, choosing love becomes possible. Ask God to fill you with His love, then choose one loving action, even before the feelings show up. Very often, the feelings follow the choice.

TALK IT OVER

1. Why can Jesus command us to love if love were only a feeling?
2. Look at the emotions chart. How have you seen hate (or a grudge) lead to fear, anger, or feeling injured?
3. Which line in the actions chart is hardest for you to live out? Why?
4. What is the difference between hating evil and hating people?
5. Who is one person you need to choose to love this week? What is one loving action you could take?

TAKE IT HOME

Pick the one line from the "Love is / does" chart that is hardest for you. Write it on a card and carry it with you. Each day this week, ask God for help, and look for one chance to choose that kind of love, especially toward someone who is hard to love.

Love is a choice. Choose it.

From fifty years of youth ministry by **Ron Whittam**. Share freely with your students and leaders. · The Youth Ministry Living Room · qrprogramming.com/livingroom

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