

"Someone the Lord Detests"

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Theme: Whatever you do avoid causing division.

Text: Proverbs 6:16-19

Here's a thought: The Greek poet Homer observed more than 2,500 years ago, "There is a strength in the union even of very sorry men."

Recently I participated in a murder mystery birthday party and played the role of a Russian rocket scientist who had defected to America in 1959. I dressed like a nerdy scientist and, after receiving five minutes of extensive training via YouTube, spoke with this pitiful Russian accent. It seems that some others at the party – maybe even my own wife and son – were surprised at this goofy, silly side of me. I come across as rather laid back and easy-going. Would you be surprised if I told you I am quite competitive? Would you be surprised if I told you that if you push me hard enough I will push back? People know me as quite organized, continually trying to keep my ducks in a row. Would you be surprised if I told you I typically don't start packing my bags for trips until the day before or the day I leave?

Have you ever seen a different side of someone that you didn't know was there? How did this help you come to know them better? Today we look at a Bible passage that might reveal a different characteristic of God that you didn't know before.

Consider this description of God in Proverbs 6:16-19:

16 There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him:
17 haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, 18 a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil,
19 a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers. NIV

We learn two surprising characteristics about the Lord:

He Hates

He Hates Certain People

He Hates (Proverbs 6:16)



Wait a minute! I don't know if He hates figs, but could God actually be capable of *hating*? We find great comfort in 1 John 4:8, "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." NIV

How can a God who is love actually *hate* someone or something?

Building a strong, healthy, fulfilling relationship with anyone requires a foundation of knowing, loving and accepting them for who they are and not for what you wish they would be. This is certainly true of our Creator and Saviour! People have a wide variety of opinions on who God is and what He is like. Imagine how you would feel if your identity and reputation were shaped by hearsay or what most people thought of you rather than by your *own* words and actions. Sometimes I get a taste of this when people have preconceived ideas of me based upon my title or based upon memories shaped by their experiences with others who have been in a role similar to mine. Maybe my voice, mannerisms or hairline remind them of a person in his or her past. As a result, conclusions about me have been reached that may or may not be accurate.

Let it be known that the Lord finds these qualities offensive: pride, dishonesty, wickedness and evil. When Solomon writes "There are six things the Lord hates ... seven that are detestable to him", paralleling six things with seven things, he uses what is called a numerical ladder to make the point that the number does not exhaust the list (W.M. Roth, "The Numerical Sequence $x/x+1$ in the Old Testament," VT 12 [1962]: 300-311; and his "Numerical Sayings in the Old Testament," VT 13 [1965]: 86). Holiness and sin are incompatible. They cannot coexist. They do not mix. This is why we cannot serve two masters. This is why trying to feed the sinful nature and nurturing a relationship with the *Holy* Spirit leads to confusion and disaster – even for those who claim to be followers of Christ.

Hebrews 10:31 was written to people who claimed to know the Lord: "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." NIV

We have this stereotypical image of God as a benevolent grandfather – much like Santa Claus – who only wants to have us sit on his lap, hear our wish list

and give us lots of gifts. We leave no place in our “pop theology” for a God who disciplines His people and who judges sin. After all, we reason, we are no longer living under the Old Covenant when God was mean and militant and we now live under the New Covenant whose nice God now turns a blind eye toward sin.

We tend toward one of two misguided extremes when it comes to sin: either we are all doomed and must do all we can to make up for the bad things we do or we are all okay and must not feel guilty. Neither position is Biblical.

Isn't it amazing how music can enhance or tear down congregational unity? These announcements appeared in a church bulletin:

At the evening service tonight, the sermon topic will be "What is Hell?"
Come early and listen to our choir practice.

The Rector will preach his farewell message after which the choir will sing "Break Forth into Joy."

When we start to look at sin through the lenses of relationships we appreciate the destruction, division and isolation that it brings. When Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit then lied about their disobedience they were not just sinning in a legal sense but in a relational sense. In other words, they were turning their backs on unbroken communion with the God who created them.

The same God that Solomon described in Proverbs chapter 6 some 3,000 years ago is the God who is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). The God who hated sin then is the same God who hates sin today. God did not have a conversion experience 2,000 years ago with the coming of Jesus Christ. He did not wake up one January 1st and resolve never to hate again. His nature and character remain consistent through the ages. The only way forward in a relationship with God is by honestly turning from sin and humbly accepting Jesus Christ's sacrifice for our sin.

What does God hate? Even though Solomon lists seven things that the Lord hates in Proverbs 6:16-18 we could summarize this way: God hates sin!

C.S. Lewis concluded, “I want God, not my idea of God.”

Do you have room in your belief system for this idea that God is capable of hating? How does this realization affect your attitude toward sin – particularly *your* sin?

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I would like to focus on the last item of this list in Proverbs 6:16-19: a man who stirs up dissension among brothers. The Lord hates divisive people.

The New Living Translation says the Lord detests a person who sows discord among brothers. I picture someone sneaking into a beautiful garden at night and scattering “weed seeds” that he brought from his own yard. These seeds are tiny and unnoticeable at first but eventually overrun the garden, choking out the beautiful flowers, fruits and vegetables that were flourishing in the garden.

This is very strong language to say that the Lord hates and detests a person who stirs up dissension. He doesn't simply detest the action, He detests the *person* who does it and says it. This should instill within us a strong aversion to dividing people, now that we know how strongly the Lord feels about it.

As the Good Shepherd, the Lord knows that His sheep – His people – are the most vulnerable when they are divided. The enemy loves to come in and pit one person against the other. The serpent did this in the Garden of Eden when he started by tempting Eve alone. Isn't it curious that the serpent did not tempt Adam and Eve together? He knew they were stronger together and weaker when separated and isolated.

The serpent brought division by luring Eve and he must have been rubbing his hands with glee when he heard Adam rationalize to God in Genesis 3:12:

The man said, "The woman you put here with me — she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." NIV

To “divide and conquer” is an ancient strategy. It is a way of keeping yourself in a position of power by making the people under you disagree with each other so that they are unable to join together and remove you from your position (<http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/divide+and+conquer>).

Listen to Paul's words in Titus 3:9-11:

9 But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. 10 Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. 11 You may be sure that such a man

is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned. NIV

Hey, shouldn't we accept everyone and their behaviour? This doesn't sound very "Christian". We learn why Paul speaks very directly to Titus in Titus 1:5:
The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.
NIV

As members of the apostolic team, Paul and Titus carried great responsibility before God for the churches they influenced and they knew that elders (overseers, pastors) needed to demonstrate the Good Shepherd's protective heart for the sheep. Sometimes this means dealing sternly with people who are sowing division in the flock.

The Greek poet Homer observed more than 2,500 years ago: "There is a strength in the union even of very sorry men."

David described the power of agreement in Psalm 133:1-3:

1 How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! 2 It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes. 3 It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore. NIV

Jesus reinforces this principle in Matthew 18:18-20:

18 I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19 Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them. NIV

Jesus was not just speaking to Peter here but to His disciples. When Jesus refers to "you" He uses the second person plural. In other words, He doesn't grant this authority to bind and loose to individuals but to two or three of His followers that come together not just physically, but mentally and spiritually. There is power when the followers of Christ walk in fellowship and unity with Him and with each other! This kind of unity is demonstrated not simply by showing up at a meeting and voting unanimously. This authority can be exercised when we give ourselves to discerning God's will and acting upon it together.

Someone should have taken more time to consider how these church bulletin announcements sound:

Next Thursday there will be tryouts for the choir. They need all the help they can get.

Eight new choir robes are currently needed due to the addition of several new members and to the deterioration of some older ones.

The devil knows that when families, churches, communities, companies and countries are united significant progress can be made! This is why division has reached pandemic proportions in these arenas. Before we brush off the relevance of this discussion and shrug our shoulders because we can't do anything about division "out there" let's ask ourselves about our own relationships and webs of influence. What do you and I do and say to promote unity in our homes, schools, workplaces, church and community? Could our fierce independence and our comments about others be hindering relationships and partnerships even amongst God's people?

Would you buy tickets for a concert where the band does not practice together or play the same songs? Of course not! Would you enjoy a parade filled with bands that do not march and play in unison? Of course not!



Who isn't impressed with the Canadian Forces Snowbirds? A Snowbirds show today involves a complex series of formation aerobatic manoeuvres and splits interspaced by the low-level precision aerobatics of the two solo pilots, all traced in smoke so the audience can follow the intricate patterns. The level of concentration required during the show is extraordinary, with each pilot using hand, eye and foot co-ordination to maintain his relative position within a few feet of the aircraft beside him. Formation pilots experience up to 5 G during their performance, equivalent to a force exerted on their bodies five times their normal body weight; the two solo pilots may experience up to 7 G during their routine. Following the crisp commands of the team leader and lead solo, a Snowbird show is a choreographed aerial ballet that lasts approximately 28 minutes (www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/snowbirds/).

What is the secret to the Snowbirds' success? Unity. What would spell disaster for them and their onlookers? Division.

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