

# Hate: The Fire That Illuminates Evil



*Jeffrey E. Hansen, Ph.D.*

## **We Talk About Love — But Rarely About Hate**

We write endlessly about love. Sermons about love. Books about love. Songs that chase love as though it were the only force shaping the human story. Yet one of the most powerful and misunderstood realities in Scripture, psychology, and everyday life receives far less reflection.

Hate.

Is it the opposite of love?

No. The opposite of love is indifference. Hate is something else entirely. It is attachment fused with hostility, a bond distorted rather than broken. Hate still connects us to what we oppose. It binds us emotionally, spiritually, and biologically. And perhaps one of the greatest mistakes we make is treating hate as though it were simple.

The Etymology of Hate: A Word With Layers

The English word hate comes from the Old English *hatian*, meaning intense hostility or deep aversion. Its Germanic relatives, *hass* and *hatjan*, suggest more than anger; they imply a pushing away, a relational severing. But Scripture adds even deeper nuance. The Hebrew word *śānē'* (שָׂנֵא) does not always mean emotional rage. It can mean to reject, to choose against, or to set apart. Already we see complexity: the Bible uses the same word for moral opposition and for relational hostility, two realities that are worlds apart.

Maybe there should have been two entirely different words. Because without that distinction, we confuse discernment with dehumanization.

### **The Bible's Paradox: Hate Has a Place — and a Warning**

The Bible speaks about hate far more often than most people realize. Depending on translation, variations of the word appear roughly 150 to 200 times. And surprisingly, Scripture sometimes commands it.

“Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.”

This is not cruelty. It is moral clarity. A refusal to baptize darkness with the language of love. The Psalms speak of hating wickedness. The prophets speak of rejecting corruption. This kind of hate protects the heart because it draws boundaries around what destroys life.

But the same Scriptures speak with equal force about another kind of hate.

“Whoever hates his brother walks in darkness.”

Here the meaning shifts. Hate aimed at evil can guard the soul. Hate aimed at people corrodes it. Jesus' words about “hating” father or mother are often misunderstood; they point toward radical allegiance rather than emotional hostility. The biblical narrative consistently distinguishes between rejecting evil and dehumanizing people. One is discernment. The other is blindness.

### **When Hate Becomes Tribal**

History shows how easily hate slides from conviction into contempt. We begin by opposing ideas, and before long we begin opposing people. We hate the left because they threaten our worldview. We hate the right because they seem oppressive or blind. We hate a race because they look different, think differently, or carry different values. This is not the hatred Scripture commends. This is the hatred that erases the image of God. And it never stays spiritual or philosophical. It becomes physiological.

## **The Heart Speaks First: Neurocardiology and the Physiology of Hate**

Before hate becomes theology or ideology, it becomes a bodily state. In a regulated emotional condition as discussed by Dr. Rollin McCratey and Howard Martin, heart rate variability organizes into coherence. As we breathe in, heart rate rises. As we breathe out, it slows. When grounded in positive emotion such as gratitude, compassion, and calm engagement, this rhythm forms a smooth sine wave. The heart and brain synchronize. Flexibility increases. Perception widens.

But when hatred enters the system, coherence collapses. The smooth rhythm becomes jagged and chaotic. The autonomic nervous system shifts into defense. And this is where Polyvagal Theory, developed by Dr. Stephen Porges, becomes essential. Hate does not land us in the ventral vagal state, the place of safety, connection, and relational presence. Instead, it drives us down the defensive hierarchy. It can push us into sympathetic activation, where adrenaline surges, cortisol floods tissues, and the body prepares for battle. Or, when that activation becomes overwhelming, the system may fall into dorsal vagal shutdown, a state of collapse, disconnection, and biological slowing. Neither chaos nor shutdown allows for wisdom, compassion, or spiritual clarity. The very physiology of hate pulls us away from the integrated state where love, discernment, and moral agency flourish.

Over time, chronic dysregulation influences inflammatory pathways, immune functioning, epigenetic expression, and vulnerability to autoimmune conditions. Telomere integrity may be affected under prolonged stress. What begins as an emotional stance becomes a biological environment. Hatred is not just a belief. It is a full-body experience.

## **How the Body Drives the Brain: Chaos and Gridlock**

When the body registers hate, emotional dysregulation communicates with the brain in four primary ways: shifts in blood pressure and vascular signaling, hormonal cascades such as cortisol and adrenaline, changes in the heart's electromagnetic field, and vagal nerve pathways carrying bottom-up information. This pushes the brain toward two extremes described by Dan Siegel. Too much activation leads to chaos. Energy outruns integration. Impulsivity rises. The mind becomes reactive. Too much shutdown leads to gridlock, the "molasses" brain, where thinking slows, rigidity increases, and clarity fades.

In both states the limbic system dominates while the prefrontal cortex loses its regulatory authority. Primitive impulses become louder than reason. Under these conditions, people

become capable of acts they would never consider when regulated. Hatred narrows consciousness.

### **Neuroception: How Hate Affects Everyone in the Room**

Hatred does not stay contained inside one person. Through neuroception, the unconscious detection of safety or threat, others begin to feel what we carry. Heart rhythms, tone of voice, posture, and micro-expressions communicate faster than words. A regulated presence can calm others. A dysregulated presence can destabilize them within moments. Research in neurocardiology and HeartMath suggests that the heart's electromagnetic field participates in interpersonal regulation. And while much remains unknown, even physics is beginning to explore how human beings function as energetic systems rather than isolated particles. We influence one another in ways science is only beginning to map. Hatred becomes atmospheric.

### **Hawkins' Map and the Weight of Low-Energy Emotion**

David Hawkins attempted to map emotional states numerically, placing shame at the lowest level around 20 and higher states such as love and enlightenment near 700 or beyond. Shame represents profound collapse within that framework. Hate sits higher than shame but remains a low-energy, constricting emotional state. His methodology remains controversial and widely debated, yet many resonate with the experiential insight that some emotional states expand life while others compress it. Hatred compresses.

### **Biblical Portraits of Hatred's Descent**

Scripture does not present hate as abstract philosophy. It shows us people. Cain allowed resentment to harden into violence. Saul's envy of David spiraled into paranoia. Judas, perhaps shaped by disillusionment and inner fracture, crossed a line that led to betrayal and despair. Hatred rarely begins as pure rage. More often it grows quietly from wounded expectation and unresolved pain.

### **A Confession and a Way Forward**

I need to say something plainly before this ends. I, too, have wrestled with the word hate. I, too, have felt its gravity pull me toward darker places. And I, too, have spoken words that were too sharp, too absolute, too strong, words that divided when my deeper longing was to heal.

If love is not the opposite of hate, it is still the antidote. Compassion softens what hatred hardens. Curiosity widens what contempt narrows. Understanding restores what fear fractures. In the language of Internal Family Systems, it is the return to calm, curiosity, compassion,

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clarity, courage, confidence, creativity, and connectedness that begins to reorganize the nervous system. In the language of Scripture, it is living from love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control that draws us back into alignment with the Spirit.

And something remarkable happens when we move toward these states. The heart begins to settle into coherence. Cortisol softens. Vascular tone eases. Inner tension releases. Epigenetic patterns shaped by chronic stress can begin to shift toward restoration. The nervous system shifts and moves in a life-giving direction. It moves back toward the ventral vagus state, the place of connection, presence, and communion, the place where Jesus most wants to meet us.

This is not sentimental optimism. It is neuropsychobiological and spiritual restoration.

Perhaps the question is not whether we have ever hated.

Perhaps the deeper question is whether we are willing to let compassion reshape the very systems that hatred once hardened.

***“Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”***

Colossians 3:14