

- ***READ Psalm 97*** The pictures and videos are not pretty. In fact, I would go so far as to say that they are disturbing, disgusting, and disgraceful. What has taken place in Charlottesville, Virginia, Phoenix, Arizona, and other places are just the latest in what seems to be a growing trend of hatred and violence being spread across our nation. What makes matters all the worse is the fact that some of those individuals involved claim to be people who love, serve, and seek to uphold the will of God. However, while they might claim to know the Lord, I feel extremely confident that the Lord knows them not because of their hatred towards their neighbors and willingness to commit violence upon those who might have a different skin tone than they.
 - It wouldn't take me very long in the New Testament to give evidence to the fact that all of mankind are precious and accepted in the eyes of God if they are willing to humble themselves in faithful service to God. We could turn to a number, but I will offer up just the text of **Galatians 3:27-29**. *"For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise."* According to the Apostle Paul, skin color, nationality, gender, nor social status have any bearing on whether or not we can be saved by the blood of Christ. You cannot hate someone who looks different than you and claim to be godly. To do such is to be wicked and evil.
 - So the question is, can one love God and love wickedness? Can one claim to serve the Lord, and yet seek to do that which is evil? I think we know the answer to this question, but I am curious by what it is said in this Psalm 97 that concerns this question. In **v.10 of Psalm 97**, we find author telling the reader that if you love God, then you must hate evil. This does not seem to be a suggestion. This does not seem to be optional. This seems very much so to be an imperative statement to love God and hate evil. Let's take a few minutes to think along these lines, especially when it comes to many of the issues that we face as not just citizens of heaven, but also citizens of a nation that seems to be facing its fair share of problems week to week.
- I. **A man cannot love God and love that which is evil at the same time.**
- A. Just as oil does not mix with water...a love for God cannot be combined with a love for that which is evil. This should be an issue of common sense, but unfortunately, man has always tried to have his pie and eat it too. I think of the children of Israel and how they enjoyed so greatly being the people of God and enjoying the immense blessings that came with being his covenant people...yet they wanted to enjoy the folly of the idols that were in the land from its native peoples.
 - B. The Israelites were foolish enough to think that they could have both God and their idols, but this couldn't be farther from the truth. Consider the words of Ezekiel in **Ezekiel 14:1-8**. These people who should have been dedicated to God had set up idols in their hearts and they have hindered them from truly serving God. They could not love these idols and love God at the same time. They had to make a choice between the two.
 - C. This same type of mindset is condemned by John in **I John 2:15-17**. The evil that exists in this world tempts us to love that which is against God, and John tells us that in doing so we will not be able to claim God. We can't love the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life and then think that we can also claim a love for God. John explains very clearly that a love for these things leaves no room for a love for God for they have nothing to do with God. We can't love two things that directly contradict one another. We can't say that we love God and hate our brother. John also says that is impossible to do. (**I John 4:20,21**) We must love God and hate that which is evil.
- II. **To love God is to love righteousness and justice.**
- A. Back in our **Psalm 97**, we notice that there are some things that are written as being key components to the essence of God. As the Psalm begins, we see the Lord being lauded as the King overall. In this fact, the earth can rejoice! Furthermore, He reigns on a throne that is founded on two key aspects of His character, righteousness and justice. (**97:1,2**) To love God is to love everything that makes Him God, and that would include righteousness and justice.

- B. To love God is to love righteousness and justice...to love that which is ethnically and morally good, pure, and right. It is to dwell on those things that are from above and right. It is to recognize and embrace what God has established as true. We show our love for righteousness and justice by striving to live godly lives each and every day.
- C. Sadly, righteousness and justice cannot be found in much of what we have seen around our country and in our society. Instead of godliness being on display...instead of justice abounding...we see wickedness and injustice ruling much of what can be seen. We see hatred for our neighbor. We see hatred for life in general. We see wickedness being praised. We see justice not being upheld. We see evil seemingly taking the upper hand.
- D. However, this is not to be so among the people of God. If we are what we claim to be, then we will be a people who will give great effort to influence those around us to also seek righteousness and justice. We will do so through the way we speak. We will do so through the way we behave. We will do so through the way we treat one another. Our God's throne is founded upon these principles and our lives must be founded upon the same.

III. To hate evil is to reject and condemn all which is evil.

- A. In all honestly, we probably are not huge fans of outright rejection and condemnation because in doing so we leave no wiggle room for acceptance or approval of the same things. I can see the wisdom in being cautious when it comes to making strong judgments such as this, but we must recognize that our love for God demands that we outright reject and condemn that which is declared as evil in the word of God. The command is clear. **"Hate evil, you who love the Lord" (Psalm 97:10)**
- B. But what does that look like? What does it look like to hate that which is evil? What does it look like to reject and condemn that which is evil? I think it first demands that we are willing to call that which is evil evil. We must be willing to declare that which is sin sin. We know that men have often had a serious problem with an unwillingness to call things how they are. This was one of the issues for which God brought strong judgment down upon Israel. Isaiah addresses this in **Isaiah 5:20**. Hating evil begins with a willingness to identify that which is evil and say that it is indeed evil.
- C. Then it continues by being a person who is will not support evil, but will in fact openly condemn the evil, whatever for it may take. There can be a strong temptation that is put on us by Satan and the world to stay silent when there is opportunity to speak out against something which is evil. Just as we might be tempted to not confess Jesus, we might be tempted to not confess sin as sin. We must not be afraid to condemn evil when it needs to be condemned.
- D. But we must recognize that there are times when the temptation to remain silent or even approve of evil is strongest. One instance might be when we stand to suffer for our condemnation of evil. Maybe our speaking out will cause us harm in some way. We must speak up anyways. Or it might be that the perpetrator of the evil is someone that we would otherwise support. Maybe our favorite politician is caught up in sin, approving of sin, or refusing to call out that which is sinful...we must still condemn the evil. Maybe our favorite athlete is in the wrong...we must still condemn the evil. Or maybe it is my school or business or team or something else that I support...when evil is being committed or upheld, as lovers of God we must stand firm on God's truth and against evil. We must be consistent in our love for God, out hatred for evil, and our approach to each. We cannot say that we love God and yet fail to reject or condemn evil in this world.

IV. We should choose to love God because of His love, mercy, and grace towards us.

- A. Finally, you might be asking yourself, "Nick, is this really that big of a deal? Must I put so much effort into standing against evil? Why should I do such? Let's begin by saying that God deserves our stand against evil and devotion to Him for who He is (**Psalm 97:1-6**) and for the good that He has blessed us with. (**Psalm 97:10-12**)
- B. Additionally, consider the fact that this Psalm that considers the idea of loving God and hating evil is actually a Psalm of judgment against those who are unwilling to do so. **vv.3-8** really key in on the power and dominion of God, especially over His enemies and those who seek to serve other gods and pursue evil. "Fire goes before Him and burns up His adversaries round about." Those who decide to pursue evil and wickedness stand subject to the ultimate judgment of God. That alone seems reason enough for me to love Him and choose to hate that which is evil.

- C. Furthermore, what good can evil really do for us? How are we truly benefitted from loving, pursuing, and committing that which is evil? Sure we might gain some temporary satisfaction and gratification from evil, but really how could anyone say that the benefits of loving evil outweighs the benefits of loving God and being committed to righteousness and justice. Just think about what we have seen in recent weeks from Charlottesville and other places where hatred, violence, and wickedness have run rampant. What benefit has been had from those things being done? I honestly can't think of anything good that has come from it. So why would we want to dwell upon and participate upon these things when we could give all of our efforts and energies loving and serving God?
- D. If we are willing to forsake the evils of this world then we can truly love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. And in doing so we are blessed to enjoy the benefits that are listed in **vv.10-12**. Preservation, deliverance, and gladness are reserved for those who seek the righteousness of God. Who wouldn't want to enjoy these things? Who wouldn't want to have these types of things in their lives? So many people are looking for these things in their lives, but they will never find them until they commit themselves to loving God and hating evil.

As our world seems to constantly be moving in a direction where evil and wickedness are not just perpetrated, but celebrated and lauded...we must remain a people who are willing to go against the tide and stand firm against evil no matter what form it takes. We must stand strong in our love for God and truly hate that which is evil. We must reject and condemn all which the Bible declares is evil and against God and His will. Sure it might be difficult and we might suffer in some way in this life, but the eternal benefits and blessings of God will far surpass any difficulties we might endure. May God help us to truly love Him and hate evil. ***PRAYER***