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## **The Good Hate (John 12:25b)**

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<b>Reading</b>
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And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. <sup>24</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. <sup>25</sup> Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”

<b>Introduction: Reviewing the Bad Love</b>
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1) Good morning, Church! When we left the Gospel of John, were looking at an amazing passage.

It’s really great that we find ourselves here this morning, being, as we are, one week from Palm Sunday.

The things we just heard Jesus say in our reading were said on the same day He entered Jerusalem beginning Holy Week.

In this passage, “some Greeks” go to Phillip seeking an audience with Jesus.

Phillip goes to Andrew who goes to Jesus, who responds unexpectedly.

He ignores the request altogether – in fact, the “Greeks” disappear from the story completely.

Jesus however sees the request as significant – He answers Phillip and Andrew: “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”

I think Jesus understood this as a picture of the whole world – not merely the Jewish world – coming to Him as He is about to be lifted up.

Just as the ‘world’ came to Him shortly after His birth in the three Gentile Magi, so it comes now in “some Greeks.”

- 2) From there Jesus moves into a parable of sorts about the necessity of His own death and then a statement about the necessity of yours – the important prerequisite for any of Jesus’ followers to bear fruit in life is dying to self.

These verses are absolutely loaded!

In these verses we see a paradigm for the Christian life, which Jesus lived in prototype.

And in it we also see the only divinely-appointed recipe for success for fulfilling the will of God for our lives.

Follow it and reproduce your life; ignore it and abide, spiritually, alone.

**John 12:24:** “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. <sup>25</sup> Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”

Our Lord does an amazing thing here.

In verse **24**, He describes *why HE must die*: “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

But then, in verse **25**, Jesus shifts to *why His disciples [us] must die* too: “Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”

Notice it: “*Whoever* hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life ...” – see the shift from Himself to us? *Whoever!*

“Hates his life” is very strong language.

It points up the fact that to *follow Jesus* means being willing to *suffer for Jesus* – to yield one’s life completely to His will.

We saw this in a few challenging passages we looked at.

These are verses that you will not here often preach today, as ubiquitous as they are in Scripture!

For instance, in **Romans 8:17**, which says we are “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him ...”

A willingness to suffer for Christ *is expected* of those who call Jesus Lord.

This willingness indicates that a true spiritual change has taken place.

One who is willing to do so proves that he or she truly belongs to Jesus.

To be so willing is, in Paul’s language, what it means to “know” Jesus – not merely about Him.

Remember that, unlike the Eleven, Paul didn’t walk with Jesus during His earthly ministry.

So, these words are very *Pauline* – and *USline*!

- 3) Jesus shows us something amazing and counterintuitive here: death is THE prerequisite to really living!

*The very purpose for a believer remaining on this earth after his or her salvation is to bear much fruit* – we’ll see that when we get to **John 15**.

But here Jesus shows us that fruitfulness in the Christian life requires a death first – our own!

In fact, we’re going to see, ‘dying to self’ is what it means to be a disciple, a follower of Jesus, a **μαθητής**.

Jesus said as much in some of the most difficult passages in the Gospels, like **Luke 14:26**:

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”

And **Luke 14:27**: “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.”

And **Luke 14:33**: “So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.”

Do you get the sense that Jesus is *not playing*?

We must soberly consider the seriousness of Jesus’ words here. They are as serious as a heart attack!

To be a disciple, a disciplines student, a follower of Jesus, a μαθητής comes at a cost – first the cost of Jesus’ death, then the cost of our own (**Romans 6:1–14, 2 Corinthians 5:14–15, Galatians 6:14**).

### ‘Unless It Fall to the Earth and Dies’

1) Now, Jesus’ grain of wheat illustration seems simple on its face:

“For a seed to be effective—to do what a seed is intended to do—it must die, otherwise “it remains alone” (αὐτὸς μόνος μένει), that is, it will remain a seed. But since the *natural* function of a seed is the production of “much fruit” (πολὸν καρπὸν), it must do what might be considered *unnatural*; it must die.”<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Bruner writes:

“Death is the exact *precondition* for fruitful life in some parts of the natural world [as with seeds], and as we now learn from Jesus, too, in some parts of the supernatural world as well.”<sup>2</sup>

Amazing, right?

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<sup>1</sup> Klink, Edward W., III, *John*, ed. by Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), pp. 551–52.

<sup>2</sup> Bruner, Frederick Dale, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2012), p. 714.

The dying grain holds within itself *the next fruitful harvest*.

So, this verse (**John 12:24**) explains the paradox of how the death of the Son of Man is actually His glorification: it will lead to MANY springing to life!

Dr. Edward Klink draws out three things here:<sup>3</sup>

First, Jesus' illustration makes a direct connection between His death and the life which will spring from it. "Just as fruit cannot come into existence without the death of the seed, so also must the ... Son die for the children of God to come into existence."

Second, Jesus' illustration explains the purpose of Jesus' Person and work. Just as the very purpose of a seed is to reproduce itself, so the very purpose of Jesus being born was to die so that others might be born again.

And third, Jesus' illustration gives us a VERY unique perspective on death. The natural man understands death to be entirely *unproductive*! But Jesus turns that idea on its head. Quite the opposite, death is actually the means by which natural things are produced, and in great quantity! Contrary to popular belief, the farmer does not lose a seed when it dies, he *gains a whole harvest!* And even more profoundly, Jesus shows us here that what is also true in the *natural* realm is true in the *spiritual* realm.

The spiritual fruit Jesus speaks of here is twofold:

It can refer to *fruit of life* (**John 12:24**), or *fruit in life* (**John 12:25**).

Jesus' death bore *fruit of life* – because of His death we are alive today.

Our death, though – the believer's death to self – bears *fruit in life*; only if we die to self can we begin to produce the fruit the Father intends for us to bear.

- 2) And that's why Jesus moves from talking about His own death in verse **24**, to talking about ours in verses **25**.

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<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, Klink, *John*, pp. 551–52.

Notice it: “*Whoever* [see the shift from Himself to us?] loves his life loses it, and *whoever* hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”

There’s more strong language here too: A disciple must “*hate* his life in this world.”

To hate one’s life means to be so committed to Christ that one’s self is actually swallowed up in the will of Jesus: ‘To live is Christ, but to die is advantage’ (**Philippians 1:21**).

Dr. Edwin Blum writes: “Being a servant of Jesus requires following Him. [And] many of Jesus’ original servants *did* follow Him—in death ... Jesus’ word was thus a prophecy and also a promise. His true disciples (those who serve Him) [must] follow Him [now] in humiliation, and [they will follow Him] later in honor or glory (**Romans 8:17, 36–39; 2 Timothy 2:11–13**).”<sup>4</sup>

So, according to the biblical Jesus, to be a disciple one must “hate his life in this world.” But should a believer try to preserve his or her life, the result will always be a spiritual disaster. Death then is the very prerequisite of discipleship, of following Jesus. *His* will for our lives – *His* agenda, *His* purposes – must be more important to us than our own or else we’re not following Him, no matter how we might insist we are.

## Dying to Self

1) The “hour” which He says has finally arrived, will begin with His death.

That’s when He, Jesus, the Lone Kernel of Wheat will ‘fall into the earth and die’ so that He can ‘bear much fruit.’

If He does not ‘fall into the earth and die,’ He will remain alone.

But then Jesus – always and ever teaching – moves to a vital principle of Christian praxis theology: *What is true of the Master is also true of those who follow Him.*

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<sup>4</sup> Blum, Edwin A., “John,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. by J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), II:317, italics mine.

Those who follow Him in death will bear much fruit; those who do not will remain alone.

At the future Bema Seat evaluation, our works will be examined and we will either be rewarded or will lose rewards based upon what we've done with the opportunities God has given us in this life.

The Apostle Paul wrote: "We [believers] must [it is a divinely-appointed inevitability] all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil" (2 Corinthians 5:10).

The danger for believers is never the loss of salvation, but the loss of reward.

That's what the Apostle John meant in his Second Epistle when he wrote:

"Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward" (2 John 8).

2) In **John 12:26a**, Jesus will say, "If anyone serves me, he must follow me."

But this is where things get really interesting because He's already told us that *to follow Him* means *to follow Him in death*.

He made this clear in **Luke 14:27**: "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple."

You'll remember that we studied how Jesus wept over Jerusalem on Palm Sunday because most of His own generation missed the time of their visitation.

They certainly knew *about Him*, but they didn't know *Him*.

And knowing Him is the very goal of our lives upon this earth.

But sadly, many come to know Jesus *for salvation* who never come to know Him *for life*, for *living*.

So, what does that mean? What does it mean to know Him?

I think Paul gave a pretty astonishing answer to what it means to know Jesus in **Philippians 3**. “But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ... <sup>10</sup> that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death ...” (**Philippians 3:3-8, 10a**).

Q. What does it mean to become “like Him in His death”?

A. Can I suggest that maybe it means that our death to self might be *fruitful*, just as Jesus’ death was *fruitful*?

3) Knowing Jesus – *really* knowing Him – is multifaceted in Paul’s thinking.

✚ It has to do with setting aside the privileges of this life to follow Him: “But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ” (**Philippians 3:7-8**).

✚ But this ‘death to self’ *also* means *truly experiencing life after death NOW* – the exuberant, forever life Jesus gives us at the moment of salvation: “... that I may know him and the power of his resurrection ...” (**Philippians 3:10a**). So, there’s *dying to self* – we’ll have to unpack what that means – but there’s also *life after that death!*

✚ But there’s something else too: “... that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death” (**Philippians 3:10b**). So, there’s *dying*, then *REALLY living*, and then *dying again and again and again*.

4) As Paul says in **1 Corinthians 15:31**, “I die every day’ (ESV) or ‘I die daily’ (NASB95). And that’s not just Paul’s personal experience; it’s actually *the template for the Christian life* – the standard for the life of everyone who calls Jesus his or her Lord. As Gary Burge put it: “To relinquish [one’s] hold on life—to give it up—is the key to [one’s] participation in the kingdom.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Burge, Gary M., “Gospel of John,” in *John’s Gospel, Hebrews–Revelation*, ed. by Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary*, First Edition (Colorado Springs, CO; Paris, ON; Eastbourne: David C Cook, 2005), p. 116.

## The Good Hate

1) Well, Jesus goes on to explain what the coming of His “hour” really means.

In verses **24 & 25**, our Lord says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. <sup>25</sup> Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”

As we’ve seen, verse **24** is about Him and **25** is about us.

Here’s how Dr. Leon Morris put it:

“Anyone who loves his life loses it (cf. **Mark 8:35** and parallels). By the very fact of his love for it *he loses the possibility of real life*. The verb translated “lose” often means “destroy” (Phillips, “The man who loves his own life will destroy it”). ... [L]oving [one’s] life is a self-defeating process. It destroys the very life it seeks to retain. ... People whose priorities are right have such an attitude of love for the things of God that all interest in the affairs of this life appear by comparison as hatred. Such people will keep their life “for eternal life”—unto the life of the age to come (see on **1:4; 3:15**).”<sup>6</sup>

2) Jesus’s words are very strong here.

So, let’s talk about the ‘good hate.’<sup>7</sup>

Disciples are not only to ‘not love’ their lives, but they’re to “hate” it.

Let’s take a moment to break down the actual Text of verse **25**.

“Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”

✠ Here’s the big question: when Jesus tells us to “hate” our life, what exactly is He asking us to do?

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<sup>6</sup> Morris, Leon, *The Gospel according to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), p. 527, italics mine.

<sup>7</sup> As Dr. Bruner labels it. Bruner, Frederick Dale, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2012), pp. 714–15.

What is he asking us to hate?

Well, there are a number of Greek words translated life:

There's **βίος**, from which we get the word *biology*.

It means just that, *biological life*.<sup>8</sup>

For instance, in **Mark 12:44**, Jesus said of the “poor widow” who put only two small coins in the offering box that “out of her poverty,” she “put in everything ... she had to live on.”

That is, all that she had to sustain her **βίος**, her biological life.

There's my favorite word for life, **ζωή**.

This word often deals with the *transcendent* life, our *spiritual* life – the life that comes from faith in Christ.<sup>9</sup>

I call this the *exuberant, forever life*.

Whenever you see the phrase ‘eternal life’ you can take it to the bank that the Greek word it's translating is **ζωή**.

So, what is Jesus asking here?

How many think He's asking us to hate our *biological life* – the fact we're alive?

How many think He's asking us to hate our *spiritual life*, the life He gave us when we were saved?

Well, what then? Make up your minds!

As it turns out, the word Jesus used here is neither **βίος**, nor **ζωή**.

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<sup>8</sup> Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 176–77.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, Arndt, Danker, Bauer, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 430.

It's a completely different word, **ψυχή**.

And **ψυχή** is a word that means soul or our natural life.

This word refers to the life we had in Adam before we were saved.

Jesus says, we must not *keep on* 'loving' or having deep affection for [*present active participle* of **φιλέω**] our **ψυχή**, the life we had in Adam.

This is the BAD LOVE.

Instead, we should keep on "hating" [*present active participle* of **μισέω**] our **ψυχή**, the life we had in Adam.

This is the GOOD HATE.

**μισέω** is a *really* strong word; it means *to hate* or *to despise* a thing.

So, the object of the 'bad love' and the 'good hate' is our **ψυχή** – everything related to our former life in Adam, our 'natural man.'

3) Let me show you how **ψυχή** is used in other places in the New Testament.

In **1 Corinthians 2**, Paul contrasts the 'natural man' (our 'old man' or 'Adam nature') with the new spiritual life we have in Christ.

"The natural person [**ψυχικός**, the adjective form of **ψυχή**] does not accept the things of the Spirit of God [**τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ θεοῦ**], for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually [**πνευματικῶς** in adverb form here] discerned. <sup>15</sup>The spiritual person [**πνευματικός**, the adjective form of **πνεῦμα**] judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one ...

<sup>3:1</sup> But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people [**πνευματικός**, the adjective form of **πνεῦμα**], but as people of the flesh [**σάρκινος** from **σάρξ**], as infants [**νήπιος**, which refers to beings ranging from fetal status to puberty] in Christ" (**1 Corinthians 2:14-15, 3:1**).

So, notice it: believers who live according to their “natural man,” *do* “*not accept the things of the Spirit of God.*”

You know, *‘the things of God are nice things to know, but not to live out.’*

Believers who live their life in Adam are spiritual babies – Paul calls them “infants (νήπιος) in Christ” – babies, even though they may have been saved for 20 years!

Paul says, “I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual [πνευματικός] people, but as people of the flesh [σάρκινος].”

The meaning of the verse then should be clear: losing our life in Adam is *the* necessary condition for enjoying – both now and forever – the ‘newness of the life we now have in Christ Jesus our Lord!’<sup>10</sup>

Now let’s go out and enjoy God’s good gift of life to us in Jesus!

Amen?

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<sup>10</sup> Cf., Köstenberger, Andreas J., *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004) *ad loc.* & Ridderbos, Herman N., *The Gospel according to John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997); Translated by John Vriend (originally published in two volumes as *Het Evangelie naar Johannes. Proeve van een theologische Exegese, Uitgeversmaatschappij* (Kampen, the Netherlands, J. H. Kok, 1987, 1992) *ad loc.*