

WHAT KIND OF TREATMENT SHOULD CHRISTIANS EXPECT FROM THE WORLD?

John 15:18-27 - "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. [19] If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. [20] Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. [21] But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. [22] If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. [23] Whoever hates me hates my Father also. [24] If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. [25] But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.' [26] "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. [27] And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning."

I hope you can see the calculated logic of this fifteenth chapter as John unfolds it. It's a wonderful construction. **First**, we have the description of the Christian in his relationship with Jesus. Disciples abide in Christ like a branch in the vine. **Second**, flowing out of this first relationship, we have the Christian in his relationship with other believers. We are to love them as we have been loved in Christ. Now, **third**, Jesus will describe the relationship between the Christian and the unbelieving world.

There's a reason this text is important for church study. While there's universal agreement among believers as to the need to abide in Christ and the our need to love and forgive each other as we have been loved and forgiven by Christ (at least until **we** are the ones with something to forgive!), Jesus' words on the believer's relationship with the world have fallen on hard times.

Let me explain. Unless we're prepared to simply approach today's text with a big eraser there is no getting around the fact that Jesus declared the world's hatred of both Himself and His followers as a huge, granite-like reality. He put it on the table as an **indisputable fact**. The animosity of this world to the church of Jesus Christ wasn't an **imagined** hatred. In Jesus' mind it was real, deep, and settled. Clearly, Jesus didn't want His disciples being disillusioned when they encountered the world's hatred. His was a loving, practical, pastoral kind of concern - **John 15:18** - "**If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.**"

And here's the problem. The internet is crammed with cool best-sellers from trendy churches that would have us all believe that whatever distance there exists between the institutional church and the culture in which it is situated is the fault of the **church**. If the world doesn't like the church it's because we haven't packaged our message right. Or it's because we have buried the beauty and relevance of Jesus under a blanket of dense church language and tradition and hypocritical life-styles. The none-to-subtle message is if only we got into the world and loved the world and related to the world, the world would be drawn to Jesus like iron shavings to a magnet.

We're led to believe the world, after all, would **love Jesus** if He were presented right. How could they not? **Everyone** loves Jesus, right? It's just the church that has messed everything up. Jesus is nothing but loveable.

And if that idea is true Jesus might be loveable but our text would insist He was incredibly mistaken. Because here's what Jesus said about how the world felt about Him, in all His loveable glory - **John 15:18** - "**If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.**"

Did you see it? Jesus says the church critics have it all backwards. The world doesn't hate **Jesus** because it hates the **church**. Not at all. The world hates the **church** because it hates **Jesus**. According to Jesus Himself, **He's** the root of the whole problem - not the **church**.

Please understand what I **am** saying and what I'm **not** saying. Certainly there are lots of reasons for people to not like much of what they see in the church - **our** church or **any other**. We're often a very poor reflection of all we could and should be in Christ Jesus. No argument from me there. My only point is we mustn't make that fact carry more weight than it can bear. That the church is flawed is true. That **that's** the reason for the world's hatred of the body of Christ is no where **close** to true. This is the topic we're studying today:

1) **THE WORLD'S HATRED OF THE CHURCH IS SPIRITUAL IN NATURE AND NOT MERELY A CULTURAL REALITY**

John 15:23 - "Whoever hates me hates my Father also."

There is a widely held notion that the church can “**fix**” the way people feel toward Jesus. On this view, Jesus needs better **representation** in this world. The solution to Jesus’ bad rap in this world is **cultural and sociological**. We, the church, are the ones to bridge the gap between Jesus being hated and Jesus being embraced.

But does this fit with the understanding of Jesus, God the Son, in our text? Jesus reveals a deeper source to His rejection by the world. Somehow, His rejection is tied to His **role** - His **mission** - His **place** - in the eternal work of God to save this creation.

It’s important to note they don’t just hate “**God**.” In fact, most people like the concept of God somewhere and of some kind. A totally impersonal universe is an icy cold place. People like the idea of a supreme being, someone to take away the **randomness** from their world. Any idea of God helps us cope with the threat of **meaninglessness**.

But Jesus says they hate God specifically as the **Father of Jesus Christ - John 15:23** - “**Whoever hates me hates my Father also**.” They hate a God who isn’t just a **general** God. God, as the **Father** of Jesus Christ is the God who is directly **related** to Jesus in His mission to die for human sin and rebellion. God as **Father** of the Son is the God who **defines** what sin is. He’s the God who says **all** people in **all** religions must repent and confess Jesus, His Son, as Lord or all. God as **Father** of the Son is the God who says no one has the moral strength or goodness to establish his or her own righteousness.

So Jesus tells His disciples the world’s hatred - the hatred they too will experience - is all tied up with the Father and the Son as they are in **mission** to redeem creation **on their own terms**. And the world hates those terms. This Father and Son are far too **rugged and defined and narrow** to fit the proud dreams of our self-made culture.

Remember, this world’s hatred of our Lord is sharply diagnosed as a deeply rooted **inward spiritual antagonism**. It’s not a **marketing** problem.

2) **IF WE FORGET THE SOURCE OF THE WORLD’S ANIMOSITY TO THE CHURCH WE’LL END UP FRUSTRATED AND DISCOURAGED**

John 16:1 - “**I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away**.”

There are two ways to “**fall away**,” to use Jesus’ words to His disciples. **First**, and most common, is to shift attention and blame away for our own sinfulness. We can blame society, God, education, poverty, hypocrites in the church, bad preaching. It’s a pretty long list. The **second**, though less common way of “**falling away**” is equally devastating to spiritual confidence. It is carrying the condemnation for something **not** our fault.

In spite of everything the New Testament says to the contrary it is painfully common to hear a thousand evangelical voices blaming **us** - blaming the **church** - for the world’s offense at Jesus Christ. And, because we all **know** how weak and faltering we so frequently are at just about everything in our Christian walk, it just seems like a good fit we should take the blame for this as well. After all, **we** have come to see how good and loving and gracious Jesus is. So how can it **not** be our fault that **everyone else** doesn’t see Him that way too?

But there is something terribly wrong with that logic. It doesn’t fit with **anything** the New Testament says - such as Jesus’ own words in today’s text - about why the world hates Jesus Christ. True, **we** love Jesus because we have already come to **bow** and **accept** His diagnosis of our own wickedly sinful, deceptively fallen hearts. That’s when our vision of Jesus completely changed.

But proud, unconverted hearts have a very hard time accepting the truth about their own condition. Every other world religion **encourages** us to earn what we can accomplish before God. Not one of them tells us there is nothing whatsoever we can do on our own. Not one of them says what Jesus says - “**Apart from me you can do nothing**”(15:5). **That’s** why the world hates Jesus.

But back to our main second point. What does Jesus mean when He says “**I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away**”(16:1)? I think there are **two ways** we might fall away when we see the world’s rejection of our Lord.

The **first** we’ve already been considering. We can easily become **discouraged**. We can allow the Devil to pour condemnation into our minds as though **we’re** the reason the world rejects Jesus Christ. And that’s a tragedy.

The **second** way of falling away is we may foolishly decide we will **frame the gospel message on our terms to make it more palatable to our audience**. We all love **results** from what we do, including Christians and churches. We all love the feel of success. We want to **see something happening** as we serve our Lord. We love to “**reach the lost**.”

All of this is good as long as it's done on our Lord's terms and not our own. The message isn't up for grabs. The character and words of our Lord aren't adaptable to the appetites and tastes of whoever is in the audience. Remember, in Jesus' parable about the four soils - the four types of heart response to His truth - only **one in four** bore fruit.

So Jesus cautions against "**falling away**"(16:1). Don't do it either through **discouragement** or **compromise**.

3) JESUS GIVES THREE REASONS FOR THE WORLD'S ANIMOSITY TOWARD HIS DISCIPLES

John 15:19-25 - "If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. [20] Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. [21] But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. [22] If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. [23] Whoever hates me hates my Father also. [24] If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. [25] But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.'"

- a) **Reason one: There is a difference in nature between the world and Jesus' disciples - John 15:19 - "If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."**

Note Jesus' repetition of those words "**of the world**." If His disciples were **of the world** the world would love them as its own. Because they are not **of the world** the world hates them.

All of this begs the question, "**Just what is the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian?**" What **kind** of separation are we talking about? Do we just have different **ideas** about certain things - Jesus, God, eternal life?

It doesn't seem Jesus' words "**of the world**" and "**not of the world**" can be shrunk to the level of different thoughts on various subjects. He's describing two different **natures** - two **separate entities**. He's talking about the kind of difference that exists between **light and darkness, life and death**. He's describing **opposites**, not just **differences** - things that can't be **mixed** or **combined** without ceasing any longer to exist.

In fact, this is the common picture of the great divide between the saved and lost in the New Testament - 2 Corinthians 6:14-16 - "**Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? [15] What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? [16] What agreement has the temple of God with idols?"**

Look carefully at Paul's questions here. He's asking: "**Is there any partnership?**" No shared task or venture. **Is there any fellowship?**" No common love or joy or affection. **Is there any accord?**" No sense of harmony or unison. No common direction. **Is there any common portion?**" No substance shared or divided. **Is there any agreement?**" No agreement on ultimate issues and questions.

This is the first reason Jesus gives for the world's hatred of His disciples. In short, there is no common **nature between them**.

Reason two: The disciples are totally aligned with Jesus. And the world hated and hates Jesus - John 15:18-21 - "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. [19] If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. [20] Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. [21] But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me."

The world took note of the disciples' **voluntary attachment** to Jesus Christ. They took note of it because Jesus had demanded **open and public** commitment. And Jesus clearly gave His disciples to understand this would be a constant source of consternation to this world committed to **self-rule** and **self-righteousness**.

Reason three: The chief reason for the hatred of the world was Jesus' insistent exposure of its sin - John 15:22 & 24 - "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin....[24]....If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father."

Just as bright sunlight reveals the streaks on a glass windowpane Jesus' **words** and Jesus' **deeds** revealed a holiness that the laws of the Scribes and Pharisees couldn't digest.

So yes, as the world sees your good **deeds** - caring for the needs of others, ministering to the downcast and hurting - they may well "**glory your Father in heaven.**" True enough. But when they hear your true words of the gospel they may well persecute you just as Jesus promised. Both are true. And they **need** to hear the truth of the gospel in **addition** to seeing the love of Jesus in your actions. Every Christian has the duty to **both** display the love of Jesus (which you can do with no words at all) **and** tell the world the truth about Jesus (which can never be done without words).

Any authentic encounter with **Christ** and any authentic encounter with **Christ's gospel** exposes sin before it pardons sin. The gospel always reveals the **necessity** of the cross before it extends the **grace** of the cross. In fact, for the mature thinker, this exposure of sin - this dismantling of human excuse and human righteousness - **is** the first revelation of divine grace - "**Tis grace that taught my heart to fear - and grace [secondly] my fears relieved."**

And everyone said....