

TWO REASONS WHY YOU MAY EXPECT THE WORLD'S HATRED

15 ¹⁸*If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before you. ¹⁹If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own; but because you do not belong to the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰Remember what I told 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 keep yours also. ²¹But they will do all these things to you for my name's sake, because they do not know the one who sent me. ²²If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have had sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. ²³He who hates me hates my Father also. ²⁴If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not have had sin; but now they have both seen and hated both me and my Father. ²⁵But [this has occurred] so that the word that is written in their law may be fulfilled, "They hated me without a [just] cause."*

²⁶But when the Comforter has come, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth, the one who comes from the Father—he shall testify about me. ²⁷And you also shall testify, because you have been with me from the beginning. (Jn. 15:18-27)

Introduction

Vera was a young woman who was expelled from her university, because of her faith in Christ. She also recalls how, when she was ten years old, her father was taken away to a prison camp because he had such a strong Christian witness in the community (*POWER*, 6/3/84, p. 2.)

Yuri knelt beside his bed and prayed; he prayed for Christian fellowship and the opportunity to partake of the sacrament of Holy Communion. Night after night Yuri made that prayer beside his bed in the remote Siberian labor camp to which he had been sentenced because of his Christian activities (*POWER*, 6/3/84, pp. 6-7.)

Hin Go Lam was sentenced to prison and hard labor in the dark mines because of his Christian witness. Upon his release he returned to his hometown to discover that his wife, his mother, and his father had all died during that 15-year interval of his imprisonment (*POWER*, 4/22/90, p. 6.)

These are just a few of the lives that vividly illustrate the truth of Jesus' words recorded in John 15:19, "*If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own; but because you do not belong to the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.*"

Because of the very favorable situation Christians in the Western world have enjoyed—living in a society that has had a Christian heritage—and because we have often times avoided a public expression of our Christian convictions, seldom have we personally experienced the truth of our Lord's words in our every day lives. Yet,

we must take to heart the testimony of Scripture: *“all who would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution”* (2 Tim. 3:12.)

As Western society continues to depart from its Christian heritage, and as we grow in our commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ, it is inevitable that we shall experience for ourselves the truth of our Lord’s teaching recorded in John 15:18-27. We must be aware of the fact that “this vile world” is not “a friend to grace,” but stands in enmity against God and against those who belong to His Son, Jesus Christ. Because of the world’s enmity against God and against His Son, we as Christians may expect to encounter that same enmity.

I. You May Expect the World’s Hatred, Because that is What Christ Himself Encountered

In verse 18 the Lord Jesus informs us that the world possesses a perpetual hatred towards Him; the Greek verb translated, “hate,” occurs in the Greek perfect tense, indicating a continuing state or action. Hatred is the world’s perpetual attitude towards Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Holy One of God. The disciples may have initially been taken aback by our Lord’s statement, for they had yet to hear the “Hosannas” uttered by the crowd on Palm Sunday turn into the blood-curdling cry of “Crucify him!” on Good Friday.

But the admiring crowds were not drawn to Christ because of His devotion to God and because they loved His holiness. On the contrary, the crowds initially flocked to Jesus out of fascination, and especially because of the expectation of what He could do for them and what they could receive from Him in terms of personal fulfillment, personal comfort, and political relief. When the self-centered and worldly expectations of the masses did not materialize, and when the religious hypocrisy of the leaders was exposed, the people and the leaders together raised the cry of “Crucified him!”

Our Lord wants us to be aware that the world’s hatred for His disciples is but an extension of its hatred for Christ Himself: *“the world hated me before you.”* This is so not only with regard to time—the world’s hatred for Christ pre-dates its hatred for Christ’s disciples—but also in terms of priority; the world does not hate us because of who we are in and of ourselves, but because of our identification with Christ. By way of illustration: A missionary suffering persecution in the Belgian Congo in the early 1960’s testifies that in response to her question, “Why, Lord, are they doing this to me?” the Lord declared, “They don’t hate you, they hate Me.”

In verse 20 the Lord indicates that we, as His disciples, may expect to receive the same reception and treatment that our Lord Himself receives: *“Remember what I told 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 keep yours also.”* When you live in a society that is strongly influenced by the gospel—and when you have very

many Christians living very much like the world—minimal hostility may be experienced. But when the Christian and the church is faithful to Christ and yielded to His Holy Spirit, and when the Holy Spirit withdraws His restraining influence from the society at large, then the “hostility index” soars. Consider the example of Lot as he bore his Christian witness and stood up for righteousness in the city of Sodom:

But before they lay down to sleep, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. ⁵They called to Lot and said to him, Where are the men who came into your house tonight? Bring them out to us so that we may have sex with them. ⁶Lot went outside to meet with them and shut the door behind him. ⁷He said [to them], I beg you, my brothers, do not do such a wicked thing. ... ⁹But they said, Stand back. Then they said, This fellow came [to our city as] a sojourner, and he would make himself a judge. Now we will deal worse with you than with them. They kept bringing pressure against Lot and moved forward to break down the door. (Gen. 19:4-7,9)

What will be the reaction to such fundamental Christian doctrines as original sin, the everlasting judgment of hell, salvation by grace, and Jesus Christ as the only Savior, from a society that has been indoctrinated with the teaching of self-esteem, the innate goodness of man, and a vision of a man-made utopia apart from God? But in the latter part of verse 20 there is the assurance that within a world that is at enmity against Christ there will be those who receive the Savior, those whom the Spirit of God converts unto Christ—there will be those who keep His word as it is proclaimed by His disciples.

In verses 21-24 our Lord deals in greater detail with the question, “Why does the world hate Him?” The world hates Christ because it does not know the One who sent Christ (vs. 21b.) The term, “to know,” here has the meaning, “to have an intimate relationship with someone,” “to have an affinity with someone or something,” “to have a love for someone.” The world by nature does not have such a relationship with God. On the contrary, mankind by nature is in a state of enmity against God: *“the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so”* (Rom. 8:7.) The proof of this is seen when we consider our natural reaction to the commandments of God forbidding our indulging in our favorite sin: our reaction is one of hostility towards God and defiance of God, not willing submission to God out of love for God. When God by His commandments stands between us and the sin we most dearly love, our reaction is not to embrace God, relinquishing our will to His; our reaction is rather to defy God and even hate the fact that He stands between us and the sin we enjoy. Mankind by nature is not only in a state of enmity against God, mankind also is under the dominion of the devil, as the Apostle Paul teaches in Ephesians 2:1-3a,

... you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the

*air [i.e.; the devil], the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.
3All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our
sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. (Eph. 2:1-3a)*

Furthermore, the world hates Christ because of the words He spoke to it—and that He continues to speak to it by means of the Scripture and the witness of Christian people (vs. 22-23.) Prior to the ministry of Jesus, the self-righteous man of Israel could suppress the consciousness of his sinful condition and convince himself that he was acceptable before God. He could do so because he had redefined and limited the law of God—viewing it as addressing only external acts and not internal attitudes. Jesus summarized that fallacious view of the moral law when He reminded the Jews, *“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment ... 27You have heard that it was said, Do not commit adultery”* (Matt. 5:21,27.) Having abstained from the act of murder or adultery, such people could feel confident that they were living within the limits of the law, having newly and narrowly defined. All the more was such a man confirmed in his self-confidence and self-righteousness by **selectively** comparing himself to other men, namely, those men who were notorious “sinners,” such as the tax collector:

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself, God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. 12I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get. (Lk. 18:10-12)

As a last resort, such a man took refuge in his inherited religion: he was a Jew, a member of the covenant community, a descendant of Abraham who was “the friend of God.” Note Matthew 3:9, a passage in which John the Baptist rebukes such an outlook: *“do not think you can say to yourselves, We have Abraham as our father. I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.”*

With the ministry of the Lord Jesus this carefully cultivated state of spiritual ignorance and “innocence” was shattered. Jesus pointed out that the law of God extends beyond merely external actions, it also addresses internal attitudes and calls for purity of heart as well as purity of life:

You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. 22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, Raca, is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, You fool! will be in danger of the fire of hell. (Matt. 5:21-22)

You have heard that it was said, Do not commit adultery. 28But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matt. 5:27-28)

Consequently, as the Light of the world shines upon them, those who were once without (the personal knowledge and conviction of) sin, now become those who are without an excuse for their sin. Their reaction is that of hatred: they hate having the Light expose their sinful condition, and they hate the true and pure holiness of God with which they are confronted in the person of Jesus Christ, the Light of the world.

The world hates Christ because of the works He did in its presence (vs. 24.) Jesus is referring both to His works of power as well as His works of goodness, as He had done previously when confronting the Jews: *“Jesus asked them, I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of those works are you seeking to stone me?”* (Jn. 10:32.) These works verify the fact that Jesus Christ truly has been sent by God, and these works demonstrate the very nature and life of God. In the absence of such works—such divine credentials—Jesus’ teaching might have been dismissed and one’s self-righteous complacency left undisturbed. But the works performed by Jesus gave divine authority to His teaching, and serve as living demonstrations of His divine teaching.

As our Lord indicates in verse 25, such hatred against His person is unjustifiable. The proper object of hatred is wickedness, not righteousness; as exhibited by the Son of God Himself; referring to the Lord Jesus Christ, the writer of Hebrews declares, *“You have loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of gladness”* (Heb. 1:9.) Certainly the Man who is the very epitome of righteousness cannot legitimately be the object of hatred—except by those whose self-righteousness has been exposed and by those who are at enmity against God and His righteousness.

As Christians, as disciples of Christ—those who have been called to become like Christ—we may expect to encounter enmity from the world, because that is what Christ Himself encountered.

II. You May Expect the World’s Hatred, Because You No Longer Belong to the World

In verse 19 the Lord Jesus draws a sharp distinction between His disciples and the world: *“If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own; but because you do not belong to the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”* Humanity is ultimately divided between those who have become disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ and those who remain in alliance with the world.

The world has a love—an affinity and communion—for those who belong to it and are one with it. But the world exhibits a deep hatred for those who have abandoned their unholy alliance with it in favor of a new and righteous alliance and allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ:

... since Christ suffered in the flesh, also fortify yourselves with the same attitude, because he who suffered in the flesh is done with sin. ²As a result, he does not live the remainder of his earthly life for [evil] human desires, but for the will of God. ³You have spent enough time in the past doing what the Gentiles choose to do: living for debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing, and detestable idolatry. ⁴[Engaged] in such [a lifestyle], they think that it is strange for you not to plunge with them into the same flood of dissolute living, so they malign you. (1 Pet. 4:1-4)

As Christians, as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ—those one who have been called to forsake the lifestyle of the world and practice the lifestyle of the kingdom of God—we may expect to encounter enmity from the world, because we no longer belong to the world. That fact becomes evident by our new Christ-like lifestyle: *“if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come”* (2 Cor. 5:17.)

Conclusion

We must be aware of the fact that “this vile world” is not “a friend to grace” to help us on to God, but at heart it stands at enmity against God and against those who belong to God’s Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. As Christians, we must also be aware of the fact that, although we may well encounter the world’s enmity, we are charged by Christ to be faithful to Him and in so doing to be a faithful witness before the world.

In verse 26 Jesus declares that the Holy Spirit—whom He identifies as *“the Spirit of truth”*—will bear witness of Christ unto the world. The type of witness He bears is revealed more fully in John 16:8-11,

And he [the Holy Spirit], when he has come, will convict the world about sin, and righteousness, and judgment. ⁹Regarding sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰regarding righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will no longer see me; ¹¹regarding judgment, because the prince of this world has been judged. (Jn. 16:8-11)

In verse 27 our Lord charges His disciples—both His original disciples and His disciples throughout the ages—to also bear witness to the world. The primary means by which the Holy Spirit carries on His witness is through the church, through the preaching of the gospel, and through the life and witness of individual Christians. Our Lord Jesus warns us to expect an encounter with the enmity of the world; but, nevertheless, He charges us to bear a faithful witness before the world. The Apostle Paul, in compliance with the Lord’s charge, exhorts the Philippian Christians to exhibit just such a witness, despite the adverse conditions in which they presently found themselves:

... let your lifestyle be worthy of the gospel of Christ; so that, whether I come and see you or remain absent, I may hear that you are standing firm in one

spirit, with one soul contending for the faith of the gospel; ²⁸and in no way being intimidated by the adversaries. (Phil. 1:27-28a)

Do all things without grumbling and arguing, ¹⁵so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without blemish, in the midst of a perverse and depraved generation, among whom you shine like stars in the universe, ¹⁶firmly holding the word of life. (Phil. 2:14-16a)

The Christian's witness is a witness **against** the world: as our words declare the teaching of Jesus and our lives reflect that divine teaching, we become a witness against the world. The Christian's witness is also a witness **to** the world: as we proceed to proclaim the gospel we bear witness to the world of the Savior who calls men to come to Him and entrust their lives to Him and be saved from the wrath to come.

Let us make the prayer of the church as recorded in Acts 4:29-30 to be our prayer:

Now, LORD, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. ³⁰Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus. (Acts 4:29-30)

May the LORD grant us to experience the same result as that recorded in Acts 4:31, *"After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly."*