

Why the World Hates Christians, Part 1

Scripture: John 15:17–25

Code: 43-85

John 15, and we'll start with verse 17. Now, I'm not going to get through this whole passage, it is too important a one, but we'll make a start. I will read it all to you, verses 17 to 25.

Verse 17 first: "This I command you, that you love one another. If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you're not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this, the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave 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. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake because they do not know the One who sent Me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates Me hates My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have both seen and hated Me and My Father as well. But they have done this to fulfill the word that is written in their law, 'They hated Me without a cause.'"

I've been telling you that this evening, this Thursday evening, the last evening our Lord spent with His disciples celebrating the Passover, this has been an evening like no other. And up to now, it has been an evening of love. It started out with an expression by John that "having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to perfection." It has been dominated by love, and that has been an incredibly wonderful time that our Lord has spent with His disciples. But now all of a sudden in a dramatic shift, it turns from love to hate. And the word "hate" is used repeatedly in this passage again, and again, and again. And I understand that's a strong word, and it's intended to be a strong word.

This is a very poignant, a very powerful portion of Scripture. Essentially, our Lord promises them persecution as a result of hatred. He tells them, and all who will follow them, a name, the name of Christ, that they will be hated by the world. Obviously, this began with the hatred of Christ Himself. They hated Him so much they killed Him. And it didn't take long for that hate to transfer to His followers.

The church is born in the 2nd chapter of Acts; in chapter 3, Peter preaches a sermon; and by chapter 4, the apostles are arrested and put in jail by the Jewish authority. In chapter 5, they're put in jail again. In chapter 6, we start to meet some of the believers in the early church by name, and one of them is Stephen; and in chapter 7, he is stoned to death by a mob after a false trial before the Jewish high court, the Sanhedrin. By chapter 8, general persecution breaks out against all believers spearheaded by a man named Saul.

By chapter 12, the first apostle is murdered. It is James, the brother of John, and he's killed by Herod. In the same 12th chapter, Herod imprisons Peter, holding him until he would find the appropriate time to execute Peter; but Peter was set free by an angel. Persecution continued so that we know from history that all the apostles were martyred, with the exception of John who was exiled

to Patmos.

We come into chapter 9 and we have the conversion of Saul into Paul, and immediately upon his conversion he faces threats and persecution from the very Jews in Damascus where he was converted. Starting in chapter 9, he faces persecution, and that runs all the way to the end of the book of Acts in chapter 28. It's all about Paul preaching the gospel, planting churches, establishing leaders, and being persecuted. His life was on the line every day, from the plotting of the Jews and the enemies of the cross among the Gentiles.

The first persecutors of Christians were the Jews who saw the Christians as heretics; and in chapter 16 of John and verse 2, Jesus told His disciples to expect this. "They will make you outcasts from the synagogue. An hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think he's offering service to God." This was the attitude of the Jews; they threw them out of the synagogue and thought they were serving God when they executed them. The Jews then are the first persecutors of Christians. They were the ones who killed Christ and they were the ones who followed up with the persecution of His followers.

In the book of Acts, the gospel began to spread into the Mediterranean world; and in the Mediterranean world, obviously the Gentiles were in control. It isn't long before the Gentiles pick up the persecution and they begin to wield the sword against Christians. The Romans carry on that persecution essentially for almost 300 years. The Romans thought they had reason to get rid of these Christians, these followers of Christ, but there were political reasons. Christians said Jesus is Lord and would not say Caesar is Lord. Allegiance to Jesus as Lord aroused strong suspicion of disloyalty to Caesar, and thus disloyalty to the Roman State; and to them, it was a kind of treason.

Christians also refused to offer sacrifices to Caesar on those occasions when they were required. They were seen as traitors. They were also seen as revolutionaries because they kept talking about another king and another kingdom. Their king was Jesus and His kingdom was the kingdom of God. And then to make it worse, they avoided harassment from the Romans by meeting in secret places at night; and their clandestine meetings only raised greater suspicion of their disloyalty and the fact that they might be trying to start some kind of revolution and riot, particularly among the slaves. And then Christians preached one God, while the Romans believed in many; and so the Romans thought the Christians to be a kind of atheist group who denied gods. This had political ramifications because there was no separation between the church and the state; no, not until America, certainly not in Roman times.

They had social reasons also. The Romans were deadly afraid that the Christians were having a strong influence among the lower classes, the poor people, and that fits what the Bible says, "Not many might, not many noble. God has chosen the weak and the poor, and the nobodies and the nothings," 1 Corinthians, chapter 1, and they were listening and they were hearing. They were also afraid that this would extend to the slaves and there might be a slave revolt.

And then all the social events of the Roman world, all the social festivals that they conducted were also tied to idol worship; they were inseparable. Christians refused idolatrous temple worship, and so they isolated themselves from the social life. So they were alienated and isolated from political life, alienated and isolated from the social life.

And add to that, they were living pure and righteous lives, which were a constant, personal rebuke to

the debauchery of the Roman world. Even economically, Christians were bad for business. Christian preachers and teachers and witnesses brought the gospel, and the gospel delivered people from demons, and that was bad for the demon business. And demon-possessed mediums and witches and soothsayers and fortune tellers made a lot of money in casting out demons. Having people delivered from demons was bad for the demon business – you see that in Acts 16. And in Acts 19, you see it was bad for the idol business because people would burn their idols, and that put idol sales plummeting.

Christians were, for all these reasons and many more, a threat. They were an alien people in the Roman world. They did not absorb; they did not integrate; they did not blend in. They existed in a complete isolation from the system, but they affected it.

Early in the 2nd century, Pliny, the Roman governor of Bithynia, lamented in a letter that he wrote to Trajan the Emperor, that the spread of Christianity had caused pagan temples to be deserted and the sales of sacrificial animals to drop significantly. Christians were then blamed for everything: all plagues, all famines, natural disasters, including the burning of Rome. For these and more reasons, Christians became hated in the Roman Empire. They were hated to begin with by the Jews, and continually by the Jews; and now add to that, they were hated by the Gentiles as well.

Now this is not just personal – though it was personal. There was going to be a price to come to Christ. You might have to be alienated from father, mother, sister, brother; you know Jesus said all those things. He came to bring a sword to sever people from their family and their friends because that's what the gospel does. There was definitely that personal alienation and personal persecution that individuals felt.

But it was more than that that our Lord was talking about here. There's something official about this, and the official persecution of the Romans began in 64, that was the first one under Nero, the Emperor Nero. Christians were arrested, everywhere they were tortured, they were crucified, they were thrown to wild animals, they were burned as torches for Nero garden parties. Peter and Paul were likely caught in the Nero persecution period, and that's the time when they were killed.

Three decades later, as that persecution under Nero faded away, three decades later in the 90s, another ruler came in by the name of Domitian, and he launched another official persecution that extended beyond Rome into Asia Minor and was even more extensive than the previous one. And it's in that period of persecution under Domitian that John was banished to the island of Patmos, and Antipas who knew John, was martyred. Sporadic persecution by the Romans continued in the 2nd century and the 3rd century. Justin Martyr, for example, a Christian leader, was executed in that period of time.

Another empire-wide persecution came in the year 250 A.D. under Emperor Decius. Perhaps the most violent of all persecutions came under Diocletian starting in the year 303. Churches were destroyed, scrolls of Scripture were burned, Christians were massacred. This went on until 324 when Constantine took power and established Christianity as a state religion; and that was the forerunner to the Roman Catholic system, which continued to be the arch persecutor of the true church.

For a thousand years after that and more, the Roman system persecuted true Christians everywhere. Roman Catholicism flourished and grew up until the Middle Ages and was the primary

persecutor of true believers. Reformation came, we all know that. Reformers were persecuted, the covenanters were killed; we know those stories.

I stood in a little graveyard in Edinburgh and looked into a little prison where the covenanters were kept – it's still there – before they were burned at the stake or beheaded. This has continued throughout history. Interestingly, there's a Roman Catholic source that says, "In all of church history, about 70 million Christians have been killed for their faith, 70 million," probably a conservative number. And then this article says this: "Two-thirds of them after the start of the 20th century, two-thirds of them after the start of the 20th century." This article goes on to say that hundreds of thousands have been killed since 1990; and they're still being killed.

All of that history is exactly what Jesus said in the passage I read you: "They hate us. They hate us. And because they hate us, they will persecute us." It's a prophecy that is absolutely accurate. Jesus said that and that is exactly what has happened.

Maybe you never thought of that as a prophecy, but that's what it is, and a very accurate one. It tells us what was to come, and that is what history recorded. And the Lord said all this on the night before His death with the eleven as He walked to the garden of Gethsemane where He would be arrested and Himself executed the next day, and start the hostility that is still going on, even today. The mass murderers of Christians today are Muslims, and it doesn't seem to be any letup against Christians, not even true Christians, just those who call themselves Christians. They couldn't sort out the difference.

Now the words of Jesus up to this point that we've been looking at in chapters 13, 14, and the first part of 15, have been words of promise, and words of comfort, and words of encouragement, and words of hope. You could say they've been words of heavenly blessing, they've been words of love. But now there are words not of heavenly blessing, but of earthly persecution.

He gave them so many promises to encourage them: He was going to prepare a place for them in the Father's house and He would come back and take them to heaven. They were going to be better off with Him going, because He'd send the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit would be in them. He told them that whatever they ask in His name, He would do. All the resources of heaven would be at their disposal while they were on earth.

He told them they would possess the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit would take up residence in them permanently. They would be empowered by and loved by the Trinity. He told them they would be given peace, that they would be given joy, that they would be fruitful and that their fruit would eternally remain, and then they would all be brought to glory. It was all about love, and promise, and hope, and comfort; and then this dramatic change from love to hate. With all the heavenly blessings, now comes the early hostility, hatred, and persecution. "The world will be – " He says, " – hostile toward you." That is true; it has been. It is and it always will be.

And, by the way, being persecuted is the cost of discipleship. "Take up your cross and follow Me." for some, there's death in this. For all, there's a measure of persecution. That measure of persecution is related to your faithfulness, your faithfulness. The Lord had given them all the proofs of His love for them, and now He warns them of the world's hatred.

When somebody says to me, “What do you think we should do about the persecution of Christians around the world? Again I say, “Accept it.” In fact, maybe if we were more faithful, there would be more of it, not less.

As He starts to talk about this in verse 18, verse 17 serves for us a very good transition. Look at verse 17: “This I command you, that you love one another.” He said that back in verse 12. He says it again: “This I command you, that you love one another.”

Back in chapter 13:34 and 35, He said, “By this shall all men know that you’re My disciples, if you have love one for another.” He told them, “Love one another as I have loved you.” Now He says, “I command you to love one another. Keep on loving one another. You’ll need it; you will need it.” It’s as if He says, “Love each other deeply, love each other humbly, love each other loyally, love each other fervently, love each other devotedly, love each other sacrificially the way I’ve loved you, because all you have is each other, all you have is each other. You’re not going to get that love from the world, you’re going to get hate from the world, so love each other.”

Peter later in his epistle says, “Love the brotherhood.” Peter says, “Have fervent love for one another.” Paul describes what that love is like in 1 Corinthians 13. “We need each other. We need brotherly love. We need the communion and fellowship of the saints in love. Love is the perfect bond that ties us together. We need this because we’re not going to get it from the world.”

Why does the world hate us so much? Why? Well, in this passage, our Lord gives three reasons at least. I will tell you the first one and only mention the second one; the rest we’ll do next time. Reason Number 1 comes out of verse 18 and 19. Verse 18, we’ll just read the first part: “If the world hates you, if the world hates you,” and it’s a conditional clause that expects a positive answer. So it could be, “Since the world hates you.”

Then go down to verse 19: “If you were of the world, the world would love its own. But because you’re not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.” So if you ask, “Why do they hate us?” what’s the answer? Because we’re not part of the system. We exist as a non-absorbed entity; we are a problem.

There’s an interesting book, secular book, on why Jews are liberal. You can ask yourself the question: “When Americans have been so good to the Jewish people, when the roots of American goodness are basically found in Christianity, why are the Jews so liberal politically?” The answer is because the past experience with Christianity in Europe set them against Christianity because it was so-called Christians who made life miserable for the Jews. They were persecuted in the name of Christianity in Europe.

And when you read the book *Why Jews Are Liberal* and you begin to see what the author says was behind that persecution, the predominant issue with the nations of Europe over Jews was they couldn’t make them integrate. They couldn’t get them to absorb into the culture, so they sat there like an alien entity and they didn’t do what everybody else did, and so they became a threat to them. They had different clothing laws, different dietary laws, different routines, a different religion, different tradition, different customs. And they were the objects of persecution because of their non-integration.

And the cultures of Europe tried to force them to integrate and they never did, and they would have little units in which they would exist together. They would begin businesses and crafts, and it would all be contained in the realm of their own life and nationality and religion. This generated a lot of hostility and hatred and fear says the author of that book.

Well, that's kind of a microcosm of how the world views us: we're a problem because we're just not part of it. The world is going a certain way and we're not going that way. The world believes certain things and we don't. The world accepts certain things and we do not. The world says certain things are right and we don't believe it. We are an alien isolated entity existing within another system, and we don't integrate.

The world, *kosmos*; what does that mean? Basically, in Scripture, it means "the evil fallen." And let me say it another way: "fallen and falling," because the human race is not through falling. Yes, it fell in Genesis 3, but it's been falling ever since. It started the fall and it's still falling. Evil men are growing worse and worse and worse and worse. The world, the system of humanity, governed by evil, is still falling. So what is the world? It is the evil, fallen, and falling system of unregenerate people controlled by Satan.

In the gospel of John, chapter 12, 14, 16, our Lord says, "Satan is the ruler of this *kosmos*." John 8: "If you're in the *kosmos*, in the system, you're of your father, the devil." There are two kingdoms existing in the world: there is the kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of God, and they do not mingle, they do not mix. We don't applaud those who do evil like the system does, Romans 1:32. "They know things are wrong, but they still give approval to those that do them." We don't do that. We don't do that.

Proverbs 29:27 says, "He who is upright in the way is abominable to the wicked. He who is upright in the way is abominable to the wicked." The wicked system hates righteousness. "If you were of the world – "and you are not. "If you were of the world, the world would love its own, *phile*. That's simply talking about natural affection. "If you are in the world, you have a natural affection for them, and them for you. But – " I love this. "But I chose you out of the world."

When you became a Christian, you were chosen by God to come out of the world. "You are not of the world – " middle of verse 19. "You are not of the world. Why? Because I chose you out of the world. You are now a living rebuke to the world." We become the conscience of the world; they hate us for that. And, oh, by the way, they love to see a so-called Christian crash and burn in a moral disaster. They love to see that. They feed on that.

Second Corinthians 4, the apostle Paul says that "we who give manifestation of the truth commend ourselves to every man's conscience." There's a law of God written in the heart of every person, the unregenerate as well as us. The law of God is in the heart; and when we preach the truth, it grabs their heart, it lights their conscience, and either accuses or excuses them. We are the conscience of the world and they hate us for it.

When you became a Christian, your relationship to the world changed: "I chose you." You see back – what He said in verse 16: "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and your fruit would remain." This is just reiterating divine, sovereign election to salvation: "I chose you. And when I plucked you up out of the world and made you My own, there

was a complete disconnect.

Listen to Galatians 6:14 how dramatic it is: “The world has been crucified to Me and I to the world.” That part of my existence is gone, it’s dead. I’m a citizen of heaven. My Father is there, my inheritance is there, my Savior is there, my church triumphant is there, my reward is there. We are aliens and strangers – ” says the Scripture, “ – in this world.”

Philippians 2:15 describes it well: “Prove yourself to be blameless and innocent children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world.” So here we are in the kingdom of darkness and we are the lights. And what does light do? Ephesians 5:11, it exposes darkness. We shine on the darkness and expose it, and they hate us for it.

James 4:4 reverses that and says, “Friendship with the world is hostility toward God.” If you’re a friend to the world, you’re hostile to God.

First John 2 says, “If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” So they hate us because we’re not part of them. We’ve been literally plucked out. “I chose you,” that’s a middle reflexive. It would translate accurately, “I chose you for Myself and picked you out, took you out of the kingdom of darkness.” Put it into Colossians 1, “Transferred you from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God’s beloved Son.”

Now the ruler of the kingdom of darkness isn’t happy about that. He hates God, he hates Christ, he hates the Holy Spirit. He hates the church, he hates believers, he hates the truth. First Peter 5:8 says, “He goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” He hates the righteous.

The church goes out; preaches sin, judgment, hell, salvation, gospel, grace; the world hates it. You say, “Well, I don’t seem to be so hated by the system.” I can elevate that pretty fast for you. If you want to be faithful as a believer try this.

Turn to 1 John 3:11, 1 John 3:11, “This is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; not as Cain, who was of the evil one.” Wow. Why did Cain do what he did? He was of the evil one, Satan. He slew his brother.

Why did that kid take a gun and shoot people? I don’t think a psychological explanation is the answer, I think a theological explanation is the answer. He’s controlled by Satan. “Satan is a liar and a murderer,” John 8. That young man was of the evil one.

Anybody who hates Christianity, persecutes Christians, is of the evil one. Cain slew his brother, not because he was jealous only. Sure, he was jealous. Not because he had some kind of psychological crisis, not because he felt unloved and unfulfilled, but because his life and his thinking was controlled by Satan. That’s what it says, “For what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother’s were righteous.”

Let me tell you how you can elevate the hostility: start identifying evil as evil. “We don’t want to do that.” Let me help you; the pope is evil. He is from the kingdom of darkness. He is antichrist. Anyone who would say that atheists are going to heaven is antichrist. Jesus said, “You will die in your sins.

And where I go, you'll never come because you believe not on Me." Not only do you need to believe on God, but on Jesus Christ.

Homosexuality is evil. Gender identity tampering is evil. Adultery is evil. Fornication is evil. Lying is evil. Pride is evil. Self-centeredness is evil. Self-righteousness is evil. That's why they killed Jesus because He said their religion was evil. Their lives were whited sepulchres, polished up on the outside with religion, but inside full of stinking, dead bones.

If you go back to chapter 7 of John, and verse 7, Jesus said – He's talking to the people – He said, "The world doesn't hate you – " just the people He's talking to walking in Galilee, " – but it hates Me. Why does it hate Me? Because I testify that its deeds are – " what? " – are evil." If we don't say that, we're sinning. You can say it in love, but it has to be said. They hate us because we're not a part of the system, because by our life, we rebuke the system, and by our message, we condemn what the system is. We condemn everything about it. We condemn its philosophies, its religion, its ideologies, its goals, its objectives – everything. And that means hostility comes from individuals, but it also ramps up and comes collectively from primarily organized religion.

It's maybe summed up in the words of 2 Timothy 3:12. Paul says, "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." We all haven't had the same degree of persecution; nobody's burning us at the stake yet. But somewhere in the world, believers are being killed, beheaded, shot.

The kingdom of darkness, seems to me, is taking over more and more and more aggressively this culture. The world hates us because we just don't belong; and we're living and verbal rebuke to this culture. What this culture affirms, we reject. Its standard of goodness and evil, we reject. Its tolerances, we reject. Its goals and objectives, we reject. We follow the Word of God, it does not.

It is interesting, however, isn't it, that so many people who are in the world now like to call themselves Christians. But that's to be expected. Jesus said, "Satan will sow tears among the wheat." This is church history, this is the history of Christianity: we are hated because we are not of the world. We are an alien, rebuking entity in the middle of this system. Satan hates us, demons hate us, and all the subjects of the kingdom of darkness are amassed against us. This is how it is.

There's a second reason – I'm just going to introduce it: They hate us because we're not part of the world, and they hate us because they hated our Lord Jesus. Go back to verse 18: "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you." Anyone who hates Christ is evil because there's nothing in Christ to be hated, there's just evil. But they hated Him He said. "And if they hate you, they hated Me before they ever hated you."

Then verse 20: "Remember the word that I said to you – " this is back in Matthew 10:24, " – a slave 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."

Simple point: they're going to treat us like they treated Christ. Same Satan, same demons, same kingdom of darkness, same hatred of God, of righteousness, goodness, truth exists. They hated Him; they'll hate us. That's why they killed Stephen, that's why they killed James, and why the slaughter has gone on ever since. And I really believe that we have to accept that reality, and I think we have to be more faithful in speaking the truth, which may even elevate the persecution. But it's necessary,

it's necessary. We have to be faithful.

In Matthew 5, Jesus said, "You're going to be persecuted; but blessed are you when you're persecuted for My sake." You don't expect to be treated better than your Lord. If He, the perfect one, was treated that way, how do we, the imperfect ones, expect to be treated any different? And if we are Christians identified with Christ, we would expect the world run by Satan to have exactly the same attitude toward us that they have toward Him. I'm not surprised; you shouldn't be either.

And if you haven't experienced any of that, maybe you're trying to be a secret disciple. Maybe you need to be more bold about what you say; and not just about the good side of knowing Christ, but about the reality of death, and judgment, and hell: hell, eternal punishment, sin. Those things need to be proclaimed. And we need to say, "Your deeds are evil, and evil has consequence, and it's divine, and it's eternal, unless you're forgiven through the gospel of Jesus Christ." Very important portion of Scripture. Oh, I have more to say on Point 2, and a whole lot to say on Point 3 next time.

Lord, we're again overwhelmed by the seriousness of this. You have explained the world to us: we get it, we see it. Your Word opens our eyes. We understand why it is the way it is. This is so helpful. Help us also to know that we are blessed when we're persecuted for righteousness sake. We're blessed when people speak evil of us because of Christ. Heaven opens up and blesses us, even in the midst of suffering. There's testimony to that through all history of the blessing that comes, even in the hour of death, to those who suffered martyrdom at the hands of sinners.

Lord, we don't have some kind of issue that makes us long for that, some kind of twisted idea of heroism; but we do want to be faithful to proclaim the truth, to speak openly and honestly about evil and sin and judgment and hell, so that sinners can flee to Christ. Help us to be faithful, to remember that in this world, we will have trouble, but you have overcome the world. So we can be of good cheer; we always triumph in Christ. And if we are to have fruit that remains, if we are to have fruit, if we are to be used to gather in the elect to salvation, we have to speak the truth. Help us to confront the sin in our world and around us, and the sinners, and show them the way of forgiveness in Christ.

And, Lord, I pray for those believers around the world now who are suffering, who are imprisoned, who are persecuted, who are under the threat of death. Some of them may not even be real Christians. I pray that somehow in the dire circumstances they're in, they would have enough knowledge of Christianity to come to a true knowledge of the Savior.

I pray, Lord, that You would give Your church power in the midst of persecution. As persecution escalates, may Your church be purified by it. May the false run and flee because they don't want to suffer. May the church that is true and genuine, redeemed be known and faithful to proclaim the gospel.

For the high calling you've given us, choosing us out of the world, we're so grateful. We have died to the world and the world to us. We are citizens of heaven. Here, we are aliens and strangers. But we are also ambassadors, given the ministry of reconciliation to preach the gospel of the substitutionary death and resurrection of Christ. May we be faithful and useful to You in that most lofty of all tasks in the world, we ask in the name of Christ. Amen.

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