

Main Idea: In John 15:18-22, Jesus gives His followers two responsibilities in light of the world’s hatred.

I. We must expect hatred (18-22).

A. Who opposes Christians? (18)

B. Why are we opposed? (18-22)

1. It’s because of our involvement with one another (17).

⇒ True love exposes selfishness.

⇒ Our love is like a spotlight that reveals the self-centered wrinkles of the lost.

2. It’s because of our identification with Christ (18-20).

⇒ Beware of a combative spirit.

⇒ Beware of a compromising spirit.

3. It’s because of our intimacy with God (21).

4. It’s because of our integrity (22).

II. We must endure hatred.

A. We are a distinct people.

B. We have a distinct calling.

A Final Challenge: Keep these two truths in mind...

1. Opposition is part of the *fruitful life*.

2. We can stand up under it by His strength.

Hated.

You wouldn’t think that the followers of the most loving person who ever walked planet earth would be hated, but they are. And not because they don’t follow in their Savior’s footsteps, which sometimes they don’t, but precisely because they *do*.

Examples of hatred towards Christians in the world...

This is exactly what Jesus Himself predicted. The night before He was crucified, He spoke frankly to His disciples. *If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. You do not belong to the world. That is why the world hates you.*

We don’t talk enough about this reality. If you want to follow Jesus, you must prepare to be hated.

Not be accepted. Not be given a place at the table. Instead, be *hated*. That’s the word Jesus used.

How should we respond to the hatred of the world? That’s the subject our Master addresses for us in today’s text.

We’ve been learning about experiencing life in the vine from John 15, and this morning we’re going to see that there’s a cost involved in this kind of life. Granted, there is no cost in *becoming* a Christian (not for us anyway, since Jesus paid that price). But there is a cost in *being* a Christian, as our Lord made clear from the outset.

Think back to the last time you got a shot at the doctor’s office. “Roll up your sleeve,” says the nurse. Then she applies the alcohol swab, followed by these words, “Here comes the prick. This may hurt a little.”

Why does she say that? To prepare you, right, so you won’t be surprised by the pain. She knows if you’re not ready you might jerk and make the situation worse.

Jesus wants His followers to be prepared for the pain of the world’s hatred.

Review: Before we take a look at our text, let’s set the backdrop. John 15 is about the fruitful life. Fruitfulness is linked to abiding in Christ (5), to experiencing intimacy with Christ, to being a friend of Christ.

*** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

Last time, we pondered the mind-boggling truth that Jesus calls His followers *friends*. What a privilege! Yet friendship with Jesus is carefully qualified by our Lord in verses 14-17. Being a friend of Jesus involves three traits—first, there’s *obedience* (14, “You are my friends *if* you do what I say”); second, there’s *knowledge* (15-16, as friends, we’re privileged to know about a special position, purpose, and plan). And third, friendship with Jesus is marked by *love* (17, “Love each other,” He said). If I am a friend of Jesus, I am commanded to love His other friends.

But there’s something else, according to Jesus, that goes with the territory of being His friend. *Being hated*.

Notice Jesus’ very next words (18), “If the world hates you.” You say, “What does the world’s hatred have to do with the subject of the *fruitful life*?” Plenty, according to Jesus.

Why does the world hate us today? Does it mean that something’s gone wrong with God’s plan?

D. A. Carson hits the nail on the head, “Even to ask such questions is to show that much modern evangelicalism borders on the frivolous. We are so often taught to think that the Christian way brings blessings without buffetings, triumphs without trials, witness without weariness. We are encouraged to believe that Christians exude overcoming joy, and rarely face discouraging defeat; that they live in a realm of constant excitement, and never wrestle with boredom; that they love and are loved, and need not confront persecution, ostracism, hate, rejection; that they are self-confident and ebullient, and never taste terror, loneliness, doubt; that they are fulfilled and satisfied, but not as a result of self-denial and daily death. It is not so much that the promises are false, that they have no substance, as that they distort truth by promising a crown without a cross. We too easily want the fruitfulness of a well-kept vine-branch, but think little about the disciplined pruning performed by the divine ‘gardener.’”¹

Listen now to Jesus’s words in John 15:18-22, “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. ¹⁹ If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. ²¹ They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me. ²² If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin.”

In John 15, Jesus is preparing His followers for His departure. He wants them to know how to live for Him when He is not physically present with them. He doesn’t gloss over the painful part, either. He speaks candidly to them that friendship with Him involves cost. They will pay a price. They will face *hatred*.

So how should we respond? In John 15:18-22, Jesus identifies a couple of vital steps.

I. Step #1: We must expect hatred (18-22).

Expect it. Which raises a couple of questions for us.

A. Who opposes Christians? (18) Listen to Jesus—verse 18, “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.”

If the *world* hates you. Who is the world? The term is used in Scripture in at least three different ways.² It can mean the created world (John 1:10--mountains, rivers, plant

¹ D. A. Carson, *Upper Room Discourse*, p. 115.

² Wiersbe, p. 359.

life). It can mean the world of humanity (John 3:16 "For God so loved the world..."). It can also refer to society apart from and opposed to God.

That's what Jesus has in mind here in verse 18. The world system. The *kosmos*. It's a system that's in rebellion against God, like society in the day of the tower of Babel. It's a system that's under the control of the Evil one. Jesus had this in mind in John 14:30, "I will not speak with you much longer, for the *prince of this world* is coming."

The world is made up of people who refuse to acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus Christ. They are absorbed either with themselves, or with their self-created gods.³

Who opposes Christians? The world does. A second question...

B. Why are we opposed? (18-22) That's a valid question. Even from a human perspective, you would think that the world would applaud Christianity—especially with its emphasis on doing good. But it doesn't. Why not?

Back in John 7:7 Jesus said, "The world...hates me because I testify that what it does is evil." There's one reason for the hatred. Here Jesus gives us several related reasons. The first actually goes back to verse 17.

1. *We are opposed because of our involvement with one another (17).* Verse 17 again, "This is my command: Love each other."

There's something beautiful about the Christian community. Following our Lord's command, we love each other. We care for each other. We get involved in each other's lives. That's a beautiful thing.

But it's also a very disturbing thing, to the world, that is. Notice the contrast between verses 17-18. Right after Jesus commanded us to love one another, He revealed that the world would hate us. Why is that? It's because...

⇒ True love exposes selfishness. In the world, it's basically every man for himself. Take care of your own. Lock your doors. Look out for yourself. And that motto seems to work pretty well for people, until someone comes along who didn't get the memo. You see, when Christians exhibit true, self-denying love...

⇒ It's like a spotlight that reveals the self-centered wrinkles of the lost. And so they do what we once did. They hate that spotlight. And in turn, they hate us.

The story of Corrie Tenboom is a good case in point. Hitler told the German people, "You are the Master race. You have a right to get rid of annoying "sub-humans" like the Jews. Think of yourself, and get rid of them." And thousands bought into his propaganda. But a few, like Corrie and her family, said, "No, God calls us not to think only of ourselves, but of others. We choose to get involved helping others, namely the Jews."

And because they did, they were hated along with the Jews, because their love irritated the establishment.

By the way, that's the underlying reason today why the world bristles at anyone who speaks out in defense of the unborn. Secular society says, "A woman has the right to do whatever she wants with that lump of tissue in her body. It's her right." And when they see a group of people getting involved defending the needs of the unborn, protecting them, even offering to adopt and raise them, it doesn't just irritate. It produces hatred, for the "I have a right to do what I want with my own body" rhetoric is now exposed for the self-centeredness that it is.

Yet there's an even more fundamental reason the world opposes us.

2. *We are opposed because of our identification with Christ (18-20).* Verse 18, "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first."

³ Carson, p. 116.

When John wrote this gospel, the world's hatred of Christians was front page news. We're talking the latter part of the first century. The Roman government despised the followers of Jesus who were looked down on as "disloyal citizens" of the Empire.⁴

And why? Oh, the Romans were very tolerant of different religions. As long as you were loyal to the basic tenet of the empire. As long as you burned a pinch of incense, and said, "Caesar is Lord," then you could go and worship any god you liked.

But that's exactly why they considered Christians "disloyal." They wouldn't do it. A Christian calls no one Lord except Jesus the Christ.

Yet, of course, this hatred didn't start with the Christians. It started with the Christ to whom they gave allegiance. Literally verse 18 reads, "Me before you it hated."

And how the world hated Jesus! Yet for no good reason. He healed them. He fed them. He taught them the truth. He loved them unconditionally. He offered them life. Yet they responded by betraying Him, abandoning Him, mocking Him, and killing Him.

It's true. The world hated Jesus from the day of His birth (when Herod the Great tried to kill him) to the day of His death (when they made a mockery of Him, and nailed Him to the cross.

Why should we expect less?

Brothers and sisters, there are many reasons that the world hates us. We speak the truth about sin. We call people (starting with ourselves) to repent of sin and submit to the Creator and His Word. We believe in a real place called hell, and talk about it. We say there is only one Savior who can rescue sinners from hell, and His name is Jesus. We say there is only one God-revealed Book, the Bible. We say there is only one way to heaven, by faith in Christ alone, apart from works.

But it's not just what we believe and teach. It's how we live. This too makes people feel so very uncomfortable. By God's grace, we love, even our enemies, and refuse to retaliate. We forgive those who wrong us. We give to those who have needs, regardless of whether they can repay. We don't laugh at dirty jokes. We don't call illicit sex and violence good entertainment. We don't color our speech with profanity. And when we do these things (and sadly, we often do), we confess our wrong-doing, first to our Lord, and then to those we've offended.

Yet it's not just what we *don't* do, but what we delight in, as well. We really enjoy things that the world finds peculiar at best. We enjoy getting together, for church isn't a grind to us, but the focal point around which our lives revolve. We enjoy devoting time to the preaching and teaching of God's Word. We enjoy gathering to sing songs that exact our Savior. And we enjoy giving our money to support ministries and missionaries to make our Savior known to the world.

And to those who don't know Him, all that's offensive.

By the way, there is a way to avoid this conflict with the world. What's that? Jesus tells us in verse 19, "If you belonged to the world it would love you as its own." There it is. Be like the world. *Belong* to it. Conform to its mold. Live a politically correct life. That's a sure way to avoid its animosity.

But that's not an option for the Christian. Why not? Because our identification is with Christ, not the world. That's what Jesus clarifies at the end of verse 19, "As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you."

You see, the world loves its own. But it hates one who is different. And we are different. We have a different love. We have a different direction in life. We have a

⁴ As Barclay points out, p. 182

different Master. We have a different allegiance. We're following different marching orders.

It's easy to forget that. But Jesus insisted His disciples *not* forget that.

Consider His charge in verse 20, "Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also."

No servant is greater than his master. Jesus is referring to a statement He made earlier that evening in John 13:16. He's reminding us that we belong to Him. And to put it bluntly, to belong to Christ means that we're going to share in the hatred directed at Christ. It's not so much that the world hates *us*. It's that it hates *Him*. And we are identified with Him. We are *CHRISTians*.

Let's not be fooled by the world's rhetoric. Yes, the world prides itself in being "tolerant" and "open-minded." But the conditions of tolerance are high. "Conform, and we'll accept you!" says the world. "Think like us, and we'll think well of you."

But woe to the person who doesn't.

I need to offer a word of caution at this point. Some who identify themselves as Christian take this verse and use it to excuse, what in essence is, obnoxious and downright rude behavior.

I remember one summer when I worked at a motorcycle factory near Marysville. One of the guys on the sub-assembly line was disliked by most on the shift. The man was a Christian, and he wanted everybody to know it. I mean *know it*. I don't doubt his sincerity. He drove 30 miles to church. He carried his Bible to work, and read during breaks. That wasn't the problem. But what really irritated the unsaved employees was the way he flaunted his opinions as if they were the God-sent truth on every religious subject. I watched the way people rejected him. He could have thought, "Well, I'm suffering for Jesus." I'm not sure it was his identification with Jesus that offended people. It seemed to me that *he* offended them.

No. Jesus' words in John 15 do not give us an excuse to be obnoxious. That's a problem for some of us. We're combative. We feel spiritual when we're stirring things up. And that's not good.

But there's another danger. In fact, in my opinion it's a greater danger to the American church than a combative spirit. It's a *compromising* spirit. And we need to beware of both.

⇒Beware of a combative spirit. And...

⇒Beware of a compromising spirit.

A few years ago there was an interesting article in the newspaper with this caption, "Church speeds up services, cuts sermon." It featured the efforts of a church in Greenwich, N.J. to attract more people.

"There's no chance of falling asleep during the sermon at the First ____ Church. There is no sermon. The church's minister is trying a new way to draw people into the fold: an express 22-minute service that he says provides all the spirituality of the regular service in half the time.

'It really is ideal,' the Rev. John ____, who has been with the church 15 years...

"The shortened version eliminates sermons and sacraments, but retains most of the elements of a regular 45- to 60-minute service, including a greeting, statement of faith, apology for sins, prayer, an interpretation of the weekly Bible reading and a song without accompaniment."⁵

⁵ *Portsmouth Daily Times*, 2/1/94

We have a problem when we try to make the church palatable to the world. We're in serious trouble when we try to make the world like us and approve of us.

Yet it seems to me that much of the modern church growth movement borders on this. The technique is simple. Find out what unsaved people want in a church. Then give it to them. Do they want a certain kind of music? Fine. Programs for their kids? You've got it. Sermons that make you feel good? No problem.

Don't misunderstand me. It's good to be sensitive and meet needs. But we must never forget that the gospel is offensive.

To tell people...

-They are not basically good people, but sinners.

-They are under God's wrath, and helpless.

-Jesus Christ is man's only hope, specifically His substitutionary work on the cross.

-To be saved, a person must die to self and receive Christ as Savior and Lord.

That is an offensive message. If we try to make it not so, we're distorting it. And we're robbing people of the only message that gives the eternal life they desperately need.

Bill Hull warns, "Avant-garde church planters, those on the cutting edge, have begun to till new ground on environment--sadly, it is the wrong ground. They advocate psychographs and building the message around felt need. Demographics design the worship service, and they focus music and other characteristics around the congregation's likes and dislikes. Use drama, special effects, and whatever can be found that will hold the congregations interest, these church planters advise. Make church fun and exciting."⁶

There's nothing wrong with trying new things. Yet we must be careful. I once read this about John Wesley, the great 18th century preacher. He measured his sermons by two standards: "Were people converted, and was anyone angered?"⁷

Jesus told us long ago, "I have chosen you out of the world; therefore the world will hate you." We are opposed because of our involvement with one another and because of our identification with Christ. There's a third reason.

3. *We are opposed because of our intimacy with God (21).* "They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me."

Notice again, the world hates Christians because of *Jesus' name*. That is, all Jesus said, did, and stands for. That's what His name represents.

But there's more. Follow Jesus' words carefully. The reason the world opposes us is because it opposed Him. And what was the reason Jesus said it opposed Him? The end of verse 21 states (in the KJV), "Because they know not Him that sent Me."

Whew! That really irritated the Jews when Jesus insinuated, and even told them bluntly, that they didn't know God! Remember John 8? There Jesus told the Jews (my paraphrase of 8:55), "You don't know the Father, but I do." Remember how they responded? They tried to stone Him!

The world doesn't care if a man claims to offer *a* way to God. But it lashes out against anyone who claims to have *the* way to God. And that's what Jesus claimed.

We enjoy intimacy with God through His Son. We know God. Does the world know God? No. Anyone who claims to know God, but refuses to bow his knee to Christ, is ignorant of God. And our intimacy with Him exposes their ignorance.

⁶ B. Hull, *The Disciple Making Church*, p. 71.

⁷ Hull, p. 95

Let's talk about a critical implication. It's impossible to be a people-pleaser and a God-pleaser at the same time. James 4:4 says, "Friendship with the world is enmity against God."

Friends, we can't avoid criticism. Inevitably someone is going to criticize us. The question is, who? Who do you want to displease, people or God?

If you think that if you resolve to please God and you always do what's right towards others, that if you always keep the golden rule, then everyone will *like* you, let me remind you that the world hated the one who gave and personified the Golden rule!

You say, "I still don't get it. Why does the world hate Jesus?" We'll see in verse 22. But the question remains, why does the world oppose us? There's one more reason here. Because of our involvement, our identification, our intimacy, and...

4. *We are opposed because of our integrity* (22). You say, "Why does our integrity irritate the world?" Simply put, integrity exposes iniquity. That's what Jesus said in verse 22, "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin."

Jesus isn't saying that before He came, people were innocent. Read the Old Testament, and it's obvious that the world was depraved before His arrival. But when He came, He took away their "cloak" [that's the word the KJV uses for "excuse"] for sin. He removed their basis for pretense.

It's kind of like the straight "A" student in school. Quite often, classmates pound the exceptional pupil with labels like, "Teacher's pet!" and "Goody-too-shoes!" Why are they so merciless? Because he makes them feel uncomfortable. He reminds them that there's a high standard. And that they haven't met it.

That's why the world hated Jesus. He broke the curve on the grading scale. He exposed them, and so they hated Him for His integrity. That's why the world hates us, too.

When your iniquity is exposed, you have a choice. Either change, or try to eliminate the source of the exposure.

Some of you have taken it on the chin at work because you refused to cheat a customer. I read about a Christian police officer who was not promoted for years because he refused to participate in his commanding officer's addiction to alcohol.

I remember U.S. History class when I was a junior in high school. We sat, not at desks, but around tables. And when we took a test, the cheating was incredible. Students would pool their answers. The teacher didn't seem to care. It was kind of a joke. Until you didn't participate. Until you said, "I don't want you to share your answers with me, nor will I share with you. That's cheating." Integrity, even when it's gracious, irritates.

What's our attitude to be towards this opposition from the world? First, according to Jesus, we must expect it. It shouldn't surprise us. People are just doing what we ourselves used to do, and still would do, apart from God's grace.

Jesus spelled out the reasons for the hatred. The world opposes us because of our involvement with one another, because of our identification with Christ, because of our intimacy with the Father, and because of our integrity.

So expect it. Is there anything else we must do? Yes. A second step, *endure* it.

II. Step #2: We must endure hatred.

Though this responsibility isn't stated outright in the text, it's clearly implied. For instance, consider Jesus' words in verse 20 again, "Remember the words I spoke to you." After a while, we may get a little weary of the hatred. We may look for a way out, a way

to turn down the heat. And there is a way out. We could stop the opposition by watering down the four distinctives that are so offensive to the world.

We could tone down our involvement with one another. We could stop making our identification with Christ our priority in life. We could do the same with intimacy with God, and integrity. And if we did this, the world would accept us, even applaud us.

But Jesus says, "Remember. Remember what I told you." The tense of the word "remember" means that "remembering" is something we are to do continually and constantly. Jesus says, "Remember who you are, my servants. Remember who I am, your Lord. Remember what I've told you, my words. And remember this. These are non-negotiables."

Let's never forget this, beloved...

A. We are a distinct people. We are *His* people. What's more...

B. We have a distinct calling. We are called to endure, just as Jesus did.

During China's Boxer Rebellion of 1900, insurgents captured a mission station, blocked all the gates but one, and in front of that one gate placed a cross flat on the ground. Then the word was passed to those inside that any who trampled the cross underfoot would be permitted their freedom and life, but that any refusing would be shot. Terribly frightened, the first seven students trampled the cross under their feet and were allowed to go free. But the eighth student, a young girl, refused to commit the sacrilegious act. Kneeling beside the cross in prayer for strength, she arose and moved carefully around the cross, and went out to face the firing squad. Strengthened by her example, every one of the remaining ninety-two students followed her to the firing squad.⁸

They *endured*. You say, "I can't do that. I'm not strong enough." That's right. None of us can, on our own. It all goes back to verse 5, doesn't it? "I am the vine, you are the branches... Apart from Me you can do nothing." Christ is our strength.

I want you to experience the fruitful life. It can be yours. But let there be no misunderstanding. There is cost involved in being a fruitful Christian.

Are you experiencing opposition from the world? Paul wrote, "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (2 Tim 3:12)." I'm not talking about going around looking for trouble. Yet Jesus said that if we followed Him, the world would hate us.

A Final Challenge...

Beloved, don't lose heart. Expect hatred. And endure hatred. And keep these two truths in mind...

1. *Opposition is part of the fruitful life.* And...

2. *We can stand up under it by His strength.*

"But Jesus is no longer here," you say. "How do we tap into His strength? And what are we supposed to be doing while we're enduring the world's opposition?" We need not wonder. Jesus gave us a *resource* and a *responsibility* for this time while we're living in enemy territory. We'll find out about both next time as we meditate on the final words of Jesus in John 15.

Until then, remember this. It will be worth it all, when we see Jesus.

⁸ *Today in the Word*, February, 1989, p. 17.