

Expecting the Rejecting

¹⁸ "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before *it hated* you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet 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 keep yours also. ²¹ But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me. ²² If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. ²³ He who hates Me hates My Father also. ²⁴ If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would have no sin; but now they have seen and also hated both Me and My Father. ²⁵ But *this happened* that the word might be fulfilled which is written in their law, '*They hated Me without a cause.*' (John 15:18–25)

One research group recently estimated that about 100 million people, who call themselves Christians, are under persecution in the world today. In our country, we're not as used to that kind of open violence against Christians. But even though we might live in a country where we are not persecuted for being Christians, we do face hostility, rejection, ridicule from non-Christians. And more and more, we see the media treating Christianity like it is the problem, the enemy, the purveyor of hate and bigotry. Political parties are polarising, adopting positions that are obviously either pro- or anti-Christian. It seems after about 1500 years of Christianity being the socially favoured religion, we are returning to the attitude of the pagan era, where Christians were the problem, Christianity was the disturber of the peace, the child that won't play ball with all the others.

God's Word is concerned to prepare Christians for how the world will treat them. It's a strange experience, becoming a true Christian. You are accepted into God's family, which is a place of love, and it softens your heart. But just at that very moment, the world hardens its heart to you, relationships with family and friends chill, cool, drift, and even blow up. Just when you thought this new life of love and joy was going to spread to everyone you know, suddenly you find all these people angry at you, hostile, unhappy!

It's hard. It's natural to want to fit in, to want to be accepted, to be part of the group, not an outsider.

Some Christians are really not ready for the world's hatred. They believe they can still be on great terms with the world if they are diplomatic, or winsome in personality, or explain things better, or do better marketing and branding of Christianity, or do more apologetics and show reasonable people just how reasonable Christianity is. They think it's a question of communication techniques, public relations, clearing up misunderstandings or showing the world the more respectable side of Christianity: the smart, successful, sharp Christians.

After teaching us about Christlike friendship, Jesus moves to the opposite pole and teaches us about rejection and hatred from the world. After teaching us the world will know we are Christ's disciples if we have love for one another, Christians will know who the world is when they have hate for us and one another.

Why does the world respond to Christians with hostility? Whom do they hate and why? Jesus teaches us here. These verses in John 15 explain exactly why the world has such hostility towards Christians.

Understanding what the world hates and why prepares us to face it and to know how to respond wisely. In fact, Jesus said in chapter 16 that this is why He was telling us. ¹ "These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble...But these things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them. "And these things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you. (John 16:1–4)

If you don't expect to be rejected, and why, there is even the danger of a professing Christian's faith stumbling. I have seen more than one initial enthusiastic embrace of Christ fade once they saw how unpopular it made them with the world.

So Jesus is going to prepare His people by explaining whom the world hates, and then why the world hates. The true target of their hatred, and the real reason.

I. Whom the World Hates: Christ, The True Target

¹⁸ "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before *it hated* you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet 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 keep yours also. ²¹ But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me... ²³ He who hates Me hates My Father also.

² They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. ³ And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me.

Let's first define the word "world" in this context. Jesus is not referring to the whole human population, such as in John 3:16. He is not even referring to all unbelievers collectively, or even particular unbelievers. The *world* when used to contrast the church, or God's people, means a belief system, a way of life, culture of God-rejection. I call it *this-world-onlyism*. Worldliness lives as if this is the only world. The lust of the flesh (idolatry of sensual pleasure), lust of the eyes (idolatry of external appearance), and pride of life (idolatry of independence).

Now when an individual, or a group of individuals promotes this system of worldliness in what they love, or what they hate: you are encountering the world, as Jesus means it here.

The hate revolves around identity: whom they hate.

Now Jesus begins by telling us that hatred of Christians is rooted in a prior hatred of Him. "You know that the world hated me before it hated you; if the world hates you." The word *before* means two things: first, chronologically – the world hated Christ before you or I were born. Their hatred stems from a very ancient battle between the seed of the Devil and the Seed of the Woman, between the Dragon and the Messiah. The dragon and his system are all about independence, autonomy, power and knowledge to live as gods. The Messiah is all about love for God.

It is not just the people themselves who have some personal grudge against Christians. No, standing invisibly behind this is the truth taught in the Bible that the human race is divided into two families: the messianic family, and the satanic family. Children of God through Messiah, children of the devil through Adam. These two families are at war.

But note: they are not treating each other the same way. One is a family of love; the other is a family of hate. And each family claims to be the family of love, and say the other one is the family of hate.

Second, priority. The hatred is primarily, firstly for Jesus. In a sense, it is not "personal". Considered on your own, your individual personality hasn't done enough to merit the hatred you will receive as a Christian.

But this implies something very special about the relationship between a Christian and Christ. There is not just a vague association, a part-time connection. There is a bond, a link, a union. You are no longer part of the world; you are now part of Christ.

Verse 19 essentially says The world hates you because you are not part of them, but I chose you out of them; The world would love its own, if you were of the world.

In other words, families love their flesh and blood. If you still had your membership card with the world, if you still were included in the family photo of Satan's children, still part of them, they'd have no problem with you. But Jesus says that believers are no longer part of the world, but have been chosen out of it. Becoming a Christian is removal from one family into another. Identity.

If it is Christ they really hate, then you have to be part of Christ, for them to hate you with their hatred for Him. And that means, insofar as you are being a faithful Christian, you cannot expect better treatment by the world than the way they treated Christ. That's what verse 20 teaches.

Verse 20 argues from the greater to the lesser. Jesus is the Lord. You're not greater than Him. If they persecuted Me, that's how they'll treat my representatives and servants.

All of this is about identity. It's Christ they hate. Christ chose you for Himself. So you have a union with Christ not only in the love He has for you, but in the hate the world has for Him.

And the chain of logic continues. They hate you, because they hate Christ. And their hatred of Jesus is actually a hatred of someone else.

²¹ But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me. ²²

²³ He who hates Me hates My Father also.

² They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. ³ And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me.

You find people who claim they believe in God, and they like God, but they don't like Christianity. They like the idea of a Creator, but not Jesus the only Way. Here Jesus blows that idea out of the water. To hate Him is to hate His Father. To despise Him is to despise who sent Him, because as we've seen, whoever has seen Jesus has seen the Father. The identity is you are in Christ, Christ is in the Father, to hate one is to hate the other.

People often hate because of who you belong to. I remember at school there were certain places, certain bus stops you didn't want to be at wearing your school uniform because of the amount of boys from a rival school who'd find you. They'd hate you, not because of you, but because of the school you belonged to.

But sometimes it is even deeper than that. Some of you have become Christians in your adult years. You come across an old school friend. They find out you are now a Christian, and you sense they don't know what to do with you. There's a distance, a coldness, it's even as if you betrayed them, like you left the team. They sense you have changed families. People are often driven by a hatred they don't even understand. They're fighting against the only One who wants to help them, as if He is the enemy. Like wounded animals that fight the vets and workers trying to help them. And you represent that.

Now if it is Christ they hate, in a way, don't take it personally. It's not really about you. Don't become hostile, and brittle, and permanently defensive. Don't make it all about you. This is the secret behind those verses that say ¹¹ "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. ¹² Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:12)

If it is not about you, and they are hating us because of Christ, we must be doing something right! We must be representing Him clearly enough! We must be speaking His kinds of words, having His responses to sin, having His love and His truthfulness, His gentleness and His directness, His meekness and His boldness.

What a comfort – if the world rejects me, it's because Jesus chose Me!

So don't take it personally - as long as it isn't your fault. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. (1 Peter 4:15–16)

If people hate you for being obnoxious, unkind, treacherous, a gossip, then don't claim the persecution card. But if they hate something Christlike, count it an honour to be His ambassador.

Here's another application: if the servant is not greater than his lord, then don't expect or try to receive better treatment and better reception from the world than Jesus. “You cannot outperform Jesus.” You cannot improve on Jesus' relationship with the world. Some Christians have the idea that they need to do better than Jesus did when it comes to public relations with God-rejecting worldliness. They think they can conciliate by appearing not quite as hard-edged as Jesus. They think they can compromise on some areas of worldliness – make Christianity more entertaining, more fun, more sleek and slick, more at home on the stage, more recognisably like a theatre, or a mall, or motivational conference, or group therapy.

But Jesus essentially tells us, if you succeed in this area, of making the world less hostile to you, then you've failed. Your success with the world is failure to be faithful. If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you. As Paul put it “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”(2 Timothy 3:12)

Whom do they hate? Christ, and His Father. So count it a privilege if you're hated for God's sake. And don't try to be friendlier with worldliness than Jesus was.

Now all of this should make us ask, why do they hate Christ? What is the big problem they have with Him, with God, and derivatively, with us?

II. Why the World Hates: Conviction, The Real Reason

²² If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin.

²⁴ If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would have no sin; but now they have seen and also hated both Me and My Father. ²⁵ But *this happened* that the word might be fulfilled which is written in their law, ‘*They hated Me without a cause.*’

Here is the problem the world has with Christ: Jesus brought conviction of sin through His preaching and His life. Jesus was the light that revealed what they were doing in the dark. Jesus was the spotlight that showed all the blotches and stains that had been previously hidden.

The word for *excuse* in verse 22 means a valid excuse. Jesus said, I've removed all their plausible ways they made themselves feel righteous. All the cover-ups, all the masks. David Wells said worldliness is what makes sin seem normal and righteousness seem strange. Once Jesus came, sin could no longer seem normal. Sin could no longer be “just the way we do things around here”

Jesus came and preached God's standards, not man's. The Sermon on the Mount is the clearest

expression of morality and purity the world had ever seen. Jesus' teaching is like pure mountain ice melting into crystal clear rivers, next to the sludgy, muddy rivers of man's traditions and self-made worship. Jesus expressed the law of love for God and man like no one before or after. Jesus exposed religious hypocrisy, religious power-games, religious corruption.

On top of that, verse 24 tells us that Jesus did works – miracles – that authenticated His teaching. He exposed sin, and then showed that He had authority from Heaven to do it. It's one thing to dismiss a man when he criticises you. But it's another thing to dismiss a man who criticised you and raised the dead. They hated the fact that His works verified His words. It was double indictment.

The result of speaking truth and authenticating His truth with kind, generous miracles which helped people is verse 25: they hated Him. To hate someone because He tells you the truth and heals you is to hate Him without a cause.

Conviction brings hatred. People hate guilt almost more than anything else.

Jesus is helping us to see the negative reaction that comes when people are convicted. The human heart does not initially welcome it. You can't sweeten this thing up without subverting the message.

The problem is not a lack of niceness. The problem is not that we haven't made Christianity reasonable enough for people. The problem is not that we are truly filled with hate, meanness, and judgementalism. The problem is that even the lightest, most diplomatic calling a sin a sin will result in conviction, which man does not want.

¹⁹ And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. ²¹ But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God." (John 3:19–21)

We remember how hated Jeremiah was because he exposed the sin of apostate Judah, just before the exile. Ezekiel was so hated that God said to him⁶ "...do not be afraid of their words or dismayed by their looks, though they *are* a rebellious house. ⁷ You shall speak My words to them, whether they hear or whether they refuse, for they *are* rebellious. (Ezekiel 2:6–7)

Or think of how the crowd responded when Stephen showed the religious elite of Jerusalem that they actually were the heirs of the persecutors, not the righteous. Acts 7 tells us ⁵⁴ "When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with *their* teeth. (Acts 7:54)

In John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, one of the most memorable scenes is when Christian and his companion Faithful come to a town called Vanity Fair, which pictures worldliness. Christian and Faithful have to walk through this fair with all its games and traders and merchandise, but they don't buy anything, and they don't participate. That's all they do. But the town soon arrests them, beats them, and takes them to the magistrate. There they are accused of disturbing the peace, dividing the town, criticising the good name of the people. The jury unanimously declares how much they hate them. Eventually Faithful is tortured and put to death. Bunyan is helping us to see that even when you look different, speak differently, and simply declare the truth, it convicts the world. They are angry that you've disturbed the peace of their self-deceived consciences.

People don't like the whistleblower who exposes their corruption, the detective who discovers the crime, the auditor who exposes the embezzlement. They don't even like the guy who quietly keeps the rules while they're breaking them. The world prefers the cloak of darkness and for everyone to play along and keep the lights off.

It's a dangerous business giving the gospel: you've got to poke the cobra's nest of a sinner's nature before you can get in there with the good news of forgiveness.

Right now, we're living in the "don't judge me" age. It's become the worst of sins to be called judgemental. And many Christians are so afraid of being called judgemental that they either change their message, or they muzzle their message. They change what they say to the world, or they change how loud they say it.

But if you're trying to avoid all conflict with the world by just keeping your head down, you're not going to succeed. Even if the world doesn't know you're a Christian, the devil does. So why not embrace your side with all your heart and do some damage to the other side. There's the story of the man in the American Civil War who wore navy on top and grey on the bottom so that he would look like he belonged to both the North and the South. The result was he got shot at from both sides.

Half the time, you don't need to say anything. Your life ought to convict the world: where you go and where you don't go. What you watch and what you don't watch. What you listen to and don't/ How you spend your money. What you love to read and hear. What you enjoy speaking about. I used to have a bookmark in my Bible that said, "If you were arrested and tried for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" Like Christ, we should live and teach in such a way that people have no excuse for their sin, no way or normalising it.

Whom do they hate? Christ – He is their true target. Why do they hate? Conviction of sin – that's the real reason.

Perhaps you have been on the side of getting angry at being convicted. Perhaps you've felt this sense of protectiveness over your independence, and your deeds, and you're offended that Christians, Christ, and the Creator should directly or indirectly say they're wrong. But now you can see it for what it is: it is being offended for the wrong reason at the wrong people. You're in the position of a wounded animal growling at the vet and conservationists trying to capture it for its healing. Christians aren't trying to harm you; Christ did not come to condemn the world but to save it, and God desires to save you from a life of selfish self-destruction. Drop the stones you want to throw at Christ and His church, humble yourself, receive Him and let Him change you.

Believer, maybe you've been feeling in despair because the world does not applaud you. Maybe you've felt robbed and saddened by the loneliness of being on the narrow way.

Remember the love Christ has for you and the spiritual friendship He calls you to have in His church.

Maybe you've been tempted to compromise, to soften the message and try to appear more familiar to the world. There is no halfway spot between the world hating you and believers loving you. As Elijah said to Israel, how long will you limp between two opinions? Choose your love, and then love your choice. Choose your family, and then find your joy and consolation in the family of God.

Above all, if you're the target of satanic rejection, take it as a sweet assurance that by grace, you belong to God's family.