

Text: John 15:17-16:4

Title: "Believe because He commands Christian love in a world of hate"

Time: 12/28/2025 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: A few weeks ago, strong winds and rain hit the coast of Kerry County, Ireland. Caught in the storm, a fishing vessel ran aground on the rocky coastline with its 14 passengers trapped between the rocks and the high winds and waves, which were beating on their damaged ship. The Irish coastguard deployed a helicopter to the crash scene, and its crew used a winch to lift the passengers of the boat to safety.

That news story is a fitting illustration of the spiritual truth that Jesus teaches in our passage. He and His eleven remaining disciples have stopped in the courtyard of the temple on their way to the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus, the true vine, has challenged them to abide in Him and in His love. He has commanded them to love one another.

Now, He speaks of the hatred of the world as He prepares them for the evening of the crucifixion. He describes the hatred of the world as though it were a sea of high winds and waves crashing against the vessel of the faithful and threatening the safety and wellbeing of His followers.

To introduce this truth about the world's hatred, Jesus reminds His disciples of His commandment that they love one another (v. 17). The rescue helicopter of the believer in the violent sea of worldly hatred is the love He commands that we have for one another. In that love Jesus's followers find rescue from the hatred of the world. What Jesus tells them about the world's hatred forms a point-by-point contrast with the love that they are to have for one another.

John writes about this so that we would believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing have life in His name (20:31). Specifically, John writes these verses so that we would believe because Jesus commands Christian love in a world of hate. He contrasts the believers' love for one another with worldly hate in three ways.

I. Loving one another, we serve Jesus as Lord; but worldly hatred only serves self (vv. 17-20).

Illustration: It is my practice when entering or exiting through a door to hold the door for someone coming the other way or behind me, allowing them to go first. As I have gotten older, more and more people do that for me — the age before beauty principle.

On one occasion, I held the door for a lady exiting the post office who stopped and refused to go first. She felt that my holding the door for her was evidence of my sense of patriarchal superiority over women, and with that protest she refused to go through the door. I gave her a few chances, but then finally I went through first myself. I later tried to explain to this neighbor that I hold the door for both men and women, but that did not seem to reassure her.

Application: That refusal to go first seemed silly, but at times it is truly difficult or even dangerous to be the one who has to go first. In a military operation, those who have to go first are often called "the point of the spear." Certainly, when it comes to experiencing the hatred of the world against God's people, going first is a true hardship.

That hardship is exactly what Christ has done for us when it comes to the world's hatred (v. 18). The world hated Christ before it hated us. One of the wonderful things about being a follower of Jesus Christ is the fact that whatever hardship

Jesus calls us to bear, He is always willing to go first, to lead the way. In fact, He also goes with us.

We must take up our cross daily and follow Him, but He took up His first for us. We must follow Him in baptism, but He did it first. We must endure the rejection and hatred of the world at times, but He endured it for us first. Even more remarkable, we are inseparable from our Lord's help and leadership whenever we suffer for Him. You may remember that he asked the hateful Saul of Tarsus about his persecution of believers, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?" (Acts 9:4). He is connected to us, and we to Him, as we face the hatred of the world.

This connection to Christ exists because Jesus chose us for Himself out of the world (v. 19). We are not a part of the hateful world anymore because Jesus chose us out of it. Judas went back to it after having been chosen, and that option is open to us as well. Others forsake the call to suffer worldly hatred out of love for a hateful world (Demas; 2 Tim. 4:10).

But for the eleven remaining, this connection as the chosen of their Lord meant that they were now His servants (v. 20). As both His slaves and His friends (cp. 15:13-14), those who would persecute Him will persecute us, and those who persecute us persecute Him. Those who would receive His word will receive our word, and those receiving our word will receive His. This word is the truth of the New Testament Scriptures, possessing equal authority to the words of Christ.

Jesus describes the world's love as a very selfish love (v. 19). He uses a different word for the world's love (*phileo*) than he did in verse 17 for the believers' love of one another (*agapao*). Westcott called the love of the world *the love of nature* or a natural love. He calls the love of the brethren for one another *the love of a moral choice*. Loving our own comes naturally.

Loving one another is a moral choice. It is this love of moral choice, not the natural love of our own things, that lets all men know that we are Jesus's disciples (John 13:35).

Jesus went first, loving us and facing the hatred of the world. Are we willing to follow Him? Are we willing to love one another in spite of the hatred of the world? Are we willing to serve Him as a slave his Master? Loving one another we serve Christ as Lord. Worldly hatred serves self.

II. Loving one another, we bear Jesus's name; but worldly hatred rejects His word and His work (vv. 21-25).

Illustration: The New Testament church demonstrated what it meant for believers to bear Jesus's name in a hateful world. Shortly after Pentecost, the apostles narrowly avoided execution because of the counsel of Gamaliel. Acts 5:40-42 says this about the hateful worldly Jewish Sanhedrin: "And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak *in the name of Jesus*, and let them go." Notice that the problem here was speaking "in the name of Jesus." This the world hates.

The passage gives the response of the apostles: "And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame *for his name*. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." Loving one another, these founders of the Christian church felt privileged to suffer shame for Jesus's name. They ceased not to preach Him.

After a lifetime of responding to the world's hatred this way, Peter assured his fellow beloved believers: "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified" (1 Pet. 4:14).

Application: It makes sense for believers to glorify the name of Christ, but it makes no sense at all for the world to speak evil of Him. Referring to the fulfillment of Psalm 35:19, Jesus describes the world's hatred of Him as "without cause."

Illustration: At times as a basketball coach I have to ask a player of mine, "What could possibly make you do that?" Ordinarily, it is something like passing the ball to a wide-open player on the other team. A coach can become befuddled over the play of his players at times.

Application: There are causes of the world's hatred, of course, like pride, selfishness, lust, and unbelief, but none of these causes explains in a legitimate way worldly hatred. It is as though Jesus could ask the hateful world, "What could possibly make you do that?" What could possibly make the world hate Jesus and those who bear His name?

Jesus mentions three things that produced worldly hatred against Him: (1) they hate because they knew not God the Father who sent Him (v. 21b); (2) they hate because they heard Jesus's words (v. 22); and (3) they hate because they saw Jesus's works (vv. 23-24). It is through Jesus's words and works that one comes to know the Father.

In the Gospel of John, the word of Jesus most hated by the world is His claim to be God. The Jesus John's world wanted was the Messiah warrior who would free them from Rome. He was David's son, but not God's Son. The Jesus our world wants is the nice moralist, who sets a good example of friendliness. Both worlds reject the true Jesus of history and the true witness of Scripture. John tells us that Jesus is God in the very first verse of his Gospel (1:1). He told haters that before Abraham was, "I am" (John 8:58), and that He and the Father are one thing (John 10:30). The world of Jesus's day and the world of our day reject this word from Him.

The work of Jesus most hated by the world is the vicarious atonement of His cross-work. They like how he healed the sick and fed the hungry, but they reject as some apostolic distortion the truth that He is God's provision of a vicarious atoning sacrifice for our sins. That it took the brutal slaughter of the Lamb of God for sinners like us to be saved is a work of Christ that our self-righteous world hates.

So not knowing the Father, and rejecting Jesus's word and work, the world commits the great sin. The great sin is the one sin for which Christ did not die, the one sin for which there is no atoning sacrifice, the one sin that is therefore unforgivable. It is the sin of final unbelief. It is the sin explained by Jesus in John 16:9, where the Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin "because they believed not on Me."

We must not commit this great sin. We must instead repent of our unbelief and trust that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing have life in His name. Loving one another, believers bear His name as those who believe; but worldly hatred rejects His claims of deity and His atoning sacrifice for our sins in unbelief. Each of us is in one of these two categories. Where do you find yourself this morning?

III. Loving one another, we testify rather than stumble; but worldly hatred persecutes witnesses (15:26-16:4).

Illustration: In the year 1054, the Christian church split into the Roman Catholic Church in the west and the Greek Orthodox Church in the east. Church history remembers this event as *The Great Schism*, and a phrase in verse 26 stood at the center of the controversy between the two sides. That verse says that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, and from it came the idea of the eternal ontological procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father. The western church maintained that the procession of the Holy Spirit had to come from the Son

too, because the verse emphasizes that Jesus Himself sends the Spirit. This addition to the creeds was called the filioque clause, and disagreement over whether it should be included split the Christendom of that day. The Christendom of our day has lost its ability to even think in these terms.

Application: But when Jesus says that the Holy Spirit proceeds *from* the Father, He uses a preposition that means *from along side of* and not *from out of*. The idea is that this Third Person of the Trinity obtains a mission from both the Father and the Son as the Paraclete, Advocate, or Witness. That mission is to testify of Jesus Christ (v. 26b), and that mission would be accomplished through the testifying of the apostles of Christ who had been with Jesus from the beginning of His ministry (v. 27). Here again, Jesus promises His church scriptural New Testament truth, which she is called to proclaim.

When that truth came and this testifying began, the hateful world expelled the followers of Christ from their synagogues. They thought that they were doing their religious duty by persecuting the church (16:2). The zealous Saul of Tarsus led the way in this cause (Acts 22:1-5).

But then we read the rest of Saul's story (Acts 22:6-21). The hateful world was once Saul's world, but that all changed when Christ made him the Apostle Paul. The hateful world he once led in its hatred of Jesus and His followers now hated him as a follower of Jesus. Becoming one of those believers who love one another, Paul testified and did not stumble. Worldly hatred then sought to persecute his witness.

Conclusion: Paul's experience should be ours too. Has his transformation happened to us yet? Has Jesus pulled you out of the hateful world and put you into the loving fellowship of believers? Paul knew that God had saved him so that you and I would know that it is possible for us to be saved too.

He put it this way: “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting. Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Tim. 1:12-17).

We can follow Paul’s example. He was the chief of sinners as the persecutor of the church, but he obtained mercy and God’s grace changed his life. That grace can save us as well.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*