

Why the World Hates Christians (John 15:17-21)

At the start of this month a gunman at an Oregon Community College went on a hate-filled shooting rampage that left 10 dead, including himself. My parents were in OR driving on the other side of the freeway at the time and saw the emergency response vehicles speeding to the horrific scene. Some sources indicated the shooter hated organized religion on his social media.¹ Rand McGowan was shot in the hand and said he heard the shooter ask if the victims ‘have God’ before shooting them.² Shooting victim Anastasia Boylan, 18, reported[he] … used reload time to ask for student’s religion. “And they would stand up and he said, ‘Good, because you’re a Christian, you’re going to see God in just about one second.’” After being shot Boylan played dead.³ Kortney Moore on the floor with the wounded heard him ask their religion before shooting. CNN recorded firsthand testimony of Matt Downing who said the shooter told a student to stand and asked his religion. When he said ‘Christian,’ he was shot.⁴ JJ Vicari said the ones identifying themselves as Christians were shot in the head, others who didn’t say they were Christian or wouldn’t stand or didn’t answer, they got shot in the leg.⁵

USA Today reports a ‘disturbing pattern to [shootings in Fort Worth, Texas](#), [New Life Church in Colorado Springs](#), and [in Charleston](#). Though [the SC one] was clearly connected to race, in all cases, Christians were targeted. We already have a research [database for church shootings](#)…people of faith, in some cases Christians, have been targeted in mass shootings…calculated killing of Christians in America is not widespread, but it does exist. We are not living under the persecution we see under ISIS and we must not pretend we are. Yet, moments like this remind us that our time may come, and, perhaps on a vacation or business trip, we may face a moment like Egyptian Coptic believers did on a beach in Libya. Or, due to a madman [in the US]⁶

[whether terrorists or troubled minds, there’s evil out there]

At the start of this year my wife and I were in Charleston, SC, just 3 miles from where the worst church shooting in modern history happened a few months ago as another troubled hate-driven man killed 9 black Christians at a church prayer meeting. I was there in SC for a wedding celebrating love in another church downtown earlier, but it’s a sobering reminder of hatred in our world that drives some to single out or seek out Christians for murder. Why do some hate to that extreme? We can’t pretend to know what grieving families are going through or what all is in the hearts of killers. We can’t presume gun laws or psychotropic drugs are a simple or superficial cause or solution. It’s not the time or place to play politics or ‘blame it on the brain.’

We can't presume it's all about biology or sociology; we *can* pray and look to theology. Jesus said in Jn 15, which we'll look to for help understanding the hatred of the world, our heart should be one of love and compassion and prayer, including prayer for gospel fruit like in Jn 15:16-17. We don't have all the answers or know all the details of some situations, but if we wonder why radical Muslims hate Christians so much in the Middle East, why Boko Haram in Nigeria guns down our brethren in churches regularly, why North Korea's government brutalizes those who share our faith, why China has such hostility toward the underground church, listen to Jesus in John 15:18:

If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but 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.

Compared to most of the world and most of church history, persecution in America is usually more mild (some question whether we should even call it by the same word, as overseas brethren have it 10x worse). But there has always been opposition against Christianity and hatred towards Christians verbally, only a few cases violently. A month after 9/11/01 Newsweek ran Why They Hate Us? This text is part. Franklin Graham called for prayer in OR, sent counselors and also wrote: 'targeting of Christians isn't just in Iran or the Middle East, it's right here in America. The bold souls at Umpqua Community College who stood up to say they were followers of Jesus Christ were heinously gunned down with no mercy. Jesus said, '*If they hate you, remember they hated me before they hated you.*' (John 15:18)"⁷

In a world of hate, is there hope? How are Christians to respond? How have some in Oregon responded? Is it possible to love like John 15:17 says, even those who hate and persecute like v. 18-20 say, even in violent virulent evil like the Charleston SC killer whose hate was directed to black Christians? If the cost for being a follower of Christ rises, are you willing to stand up for Jesus? Most aren't called to die for our faith, but are we ready to live for it?

1st reality Jesus wants us to know in the text: The World Hates Christians
 The Greek grammar authority A.T. Robertson says '*if the world hates you*' in v. 18 is a certainty, not a possibility in the rules of Greek grammar, and it is a perfect active verb here, meaning 'has hated and still hates.'⁸ The idea is *if the world hates (and it does), or since the world hated and is continually in the state of hating* you, just know they hated Jesus before they hated you.

What do they hate Christians for in context? It's not hatred for being a jerk, sometimes we Christians can make people hate us because we come across as jerks, or on account of our insensitivity. Don't use v. 18 as your shield if you're unkind or unloving and people hate you, you need to go back to v. 17 and make sure you're loving. And notice the hate in the context of v. 19 isn't that you can't be likeable, it's that you can't be living *like the world* in its sin and they find your refusal to be '*of the world*' detestable. In v. 21 Jesus says this is hatred '*on account of my name*,' in other words, it's hatred for Christ's sake, on account of our identification with the name of the Jesus they reject.

What is the *world* in v. 18 that hates Christians? *World* here doesn't mean every person on the planet in context, because He began this whole section saying Christians love each other, it's how the world knows who Christians are. So the world in the context is non-Christians, those who hate Christians

The Greek word is *cosmos* that we get *cosmology* from, the world order, or *cosmetics*. My former pastor says cosmetics on a ladies' face in the morning brings order to disorder. The world in v. 18 is the order, system, or the way of this fallen world apart from Christ's order and kingdom. Turn to Jn 3 and I want you to see in the earlier context some background on how Jesus uses the word *world* in this sense and why Christians are literally 'worlds apart':

3:19 *And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness [this is the sinful world] rather than the light because their works were evil.²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.*

When I was in the Philippines you learned not to walk into the kitchen late at night without turning the light switch on. Any guesses why? There were cockroaches 2-3 inches long and there's few things nastier than bare feet crunching on cockroaches. If you've ever looked at a tropical cockroach up close, they're disgusting looking, even demonic looking. I could barely with a paper towel pick up a dead one to put in the trash. Cockroaches are evil. If you turn on the light switch before you enter the room, though, they scatter. They love the darkness but they can't stand the light shining on them. The world is like that. It's evil. It loves its sin and loves the darkness and it hates the light of Christ and His Word shining on it because it exposes its sinning.

In v. 3 Jesus says we need to be born again to see the things of His kingdom but this blindness isn't like a physical disability, it's a spiritual disinterest in and dislike of the kingdom of light in v. 19-20 at the root of sin's blindness.

If radical sinfulness is true, like we saw last week, that the world is blind to and unresponsive to spiritual things, if they're depraved and enslaved to sin, how can God hold responsible men who can't see and can't free themselves? We need to remember what we read last time in John 8, sinners don't want to be free, their will is to do their sin, their sin blinds and here they refuse to come to the light because they don't want the evil deeds they choose to be seen. It is exactly what they desire. Rom 1 says men know this but suppress the truth, that's part of what makes men without excuse. Part of the answer to the 'how are sinners responsible' question is sinners do exactly what they want and love in rejecting the light of Christ. The Greek word in v. 19 for the world's love of darkness is *agape*, they love sin with the strongest love, *agape* love that's a choice, the love of the will, a love that puts its love first.

Now when someone or something you love with *agape* love is called evil, those are fighting words. If you were to call my wife evil my flesh will rise up to defend my beloved! The world's beloved that it loves with *agape* love is darkness, sin, and when its' love is called evil, those are fighting words. It rises up to defend what it loves. It doesn't want to give up or let go of its sin any more than Gollum wanted to give up or let go of his ring, his 'precious.'

James 4 says the source of all conflict whether quarreling or even killing in extreme cases, the source is our passionate desires: things we want so badly that we'll do anything to get it or to get those in our way out of the way. In most cases, most normal people in western societies don't act out the hatred in their heart with murder, the law restrains, but hate is murder of the heart. The same John who's in the upper room in Jn 15 and wrote Jn 3 wrote in 1 Jn 3:13-15 *Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you ... Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer ...*

Peter was also there in the upper room and understood why the world hates us, he said they usually don't act out murder physically, but instead malign us verbally since we're not *of them*: the world's '*surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you*' (1 Pet 4:4). The world's surprised you reject their sin, don't be surprised they reject you John 3:19-20 says the world will hate it when the light is shone on their sin, exposing it for what it is. Jesus taught His followers '*you are the light of the world*' and we're to let our light shine to the world and be salt to the world to preserve righteousness, and salt also stings. Jesus said we're salt and light right after He said we're blessed when we're persecuted for His sake, hated. Moody said if the world says nothing against us, what will Jesus say for us?

If everyone in the world likes us, we're not shining His light on the world. It may be we need to consider if we have His light, or are we hiding it under a bushel. Our kids sing 'no, I'm gonna let it shine, don't let Satan poof it out!'

Now look at John 7:7 where Jesus explains the world's hate isn't personal toward us, ultimately the world hates Him not us: Jn 7:7 *The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil.* It isn't really us the world hates when we say what Christ says, it's Christ they hate because Christ calls a spade a spade, and he calls the world's sin a sin.

So you can go back to John 15 and as you do, Jesus wants you to know the world's hatred of Christians isn't something unusual (we should expect it), and it also isn't something personal. They hate Jesus who calls what they do sinful or evil and if we say what Jesus says in His Word they'll hate us, too. If you want proof of this verse, try this: say to people in the world this week that homosexuality is evil. Try going to a school campus and telling people it's an evil to change the gender God gave them when He created them. Try telling a science professor evolution is an evil lie. Try to tell atheists their suppressing truth is unrighteousness. Try saying Planned Parenthood is evil. Try explaining Islam is evil, so is all false religion and forms of Christianity rejecting gospel salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Try telling the postmodern pluralists there is absolute truth and Jesus is the truth and the life and the only way to God. Try it, see if everyone loves you!

Jesus said we're the light of the world, the world hates the light because its deeds are evil, it hates the Word of Christ because it testifies of their evil. So don't be surprised the evil world hates you as you speak Christ's Word or shine His light. Don't take it personally, it's actually really toward Jesus. He says in Jn 15:18 the world '*hated me before it hated you.*'¹⁹ *If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.*

Jesus didn't choose the world, He chose His followers out from the world, therefore the world hates them. In v. 16 Jesus says it's not that you chose me, it's that I chose you first, now in v. 18 He says when the world chooses to reject you, just know the world chose to reject me first. We love Him because He first loved us; the world hates us because it hated Him first. Boice: 'the world rejects Christ's salvation and despises his work, it also hates those who have been chosen by him for it... in sovereign grace ...Why does the world hate Christians? It hates them because it hates their Master.'⁹

The end of 15:19 says ‘...*I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.*’ In v. 15 Jesus chose them as His friends but later in Scripture we read that *friendship with the world is hatred toward God* (James 4:4 NIV). The world hates the Lord and hates His friends and if we get too friendly with the sinful world we’re joining His haters and rebels.

Former rebels who have left the rebel alliance to join the other side of the force aren’t popular with those who are still with the rebel alliance. Rebels are haters of those they see as traitors. We’re in the world but not of it, and if you think they don’t hate Christians in America, think again and wake up. Awhile back, an article in World News Daily ran with the headline “Born Again Should Not Have Right to Vote, Popular Radio Host says...” It wrote Garrison Keillor, host of a popular National Public Radio show said he was on a campaign ‘to take the right to vote away from born-again Christians. [enthusiastic audience applause] Just a little project of mine. My feeling is that born-again people are citizens of heaven, that is where there citizenship is, [laughter] is in heaven, it’s not here among us in America...”¹⁰

Just this month the SA News headlines include “Hate for homeschoilers rattles Marine Who Served in Iraq” and another label of hate for the law firm defending Kim Davis. 2 days ago the headline from St. Louis was “7th church burned in past 2 weeks.” Older headline: “North Korea Celebrates ‘Hate America’ Month,” and others included “Christianity will be labeled ‘hate speech,’” “Christians facing new status as ‘hated minority,’ “Club labeled ‘Hate Group’ for requesting to opt out of LBGT Training,” and “Christians Who Stand for Truth, Stand for Christ, Will Be Hated,” etc.¹¹

Are we ready to stand up for Jesus, or will we be surprised by persecution?

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 also keep yours.* ²¹ *But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.*

It’s not just because of His name that they do all this, it’s because they don’t know God the Father who sent Him. In v. 20 the way people responded to Christ’s Word is how they’ll respond to Christ’s witnesses. We’re no better than Christ and shouldn’t expect to be treated differently than Christ was. If we represent Him, we’ll get responses like Him. Bonhoeffer wrote in 1937 *The Cost of Discipleship* these words years before dying in a concentration camp:¹² Suffering ... is the badge of the true Christian. The disciple is not above his master ... Luther reckoned suffering among the marks of the true

church ... Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ, and it is therefore not at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer

Eric Alexander points out that when it says a servant is not greater than his master in John 13 the point is humility and in John 15 the point is hostility. He said we shouldn't respond to hate by retreating into isolation or reacting in retaliation.¹³ How should we respond to a world that hates Christianity?

1st application: Consider ourselves

Are you among those the world hates or are you "of the world" so the world loves you "as its own"? This is a test of how we're living or who's living in us? v. 19 says the world will love us as its own if we're 'of the world,' that is because we're worldly, but if we've been chosen and called out of the world, the unsaved world will hate us. If you never know the world's hatred, it may be because you're still part of it and need to turn from your sin to trust Him, 'the world behind me, the cross before me.' You can gain the world but lose your soul, but if you repent and renounce it by faith, His new world awaits.

2nd application: Keep loving

¹⁷ *These things I command you, so that you will love one another.* ¹⁸ *"If the world hates you... [before the present tense verb hate He gave a present tense command to love, to say 'as the world keeps on hating, you keep on loving']*

Continual hatred of Christians is to be expected till Jesus returns, our job as Christians is continual love. I'm called to love the world, not be loved by it. Jesus said earlier "*Woe to you, when all people speak well of you ... Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you...Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man!*" (Lk 6:26-28, 22). 3 days before this upper room scene in John 15, Jesus said in Mt 24 until His coming: '*you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake...And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all... [keep enduring in love, share Jesus' love]*

May our love not grow cold as criticism and opposition mounts. Even in the church I sense there's a season we're entering in of criticism and opposition and misjudging and maligning and reviling among Christians, and that can cause the love of many to grow cold. But Christ calls us to endure to the end

Christ calls us to not grow cold, but to stay hot for the gospel. The darker it gets, the more we can let our light shine as we speak the gospel truth in love

Christians need to stand together, stand in gospel unity, stand up for Jesus. In the aftermath of the Oregon college shooting this month one writer that came to the scene noticed 2 posters put up by friends and family of victims. 'One read: "Stand up, stand up for Jesus, Ye soldiers of the cross. They stood up." The other: "I'm Christian." [Yes, I am Christian] ... a little four inch cross tied on the barbed wire...read, "Love Never Fails" (for Melody, a mother who lost her daughter, a mom whose other kids were 8 and younger) ... I talked to [Dennis Kreiss](#), who pastors...has been in the hospital visiting with families of the victims ...he echoed Jesus' words in Matthew 5:44...love our enemies and to pray for those who hate us and despitefully use us.'¹⁴

In the Charleston, SC church shooting aftermath earlier this year, we saw on display unfailing love in the face of hate. I shared this a few Sunday nights back, but most of you weren't there and all of us can stand to hear it again.¹⁵ As Dylan Roof stood at his initial hearing in a striped jumpsuit, the judge let family members of the murdered victims say any words to the killer directly

One media source said it's rare in bail bond hearings for people to speak to the accused, but the words these family members spoke was even rarer still. First to speak, a daughter, spoke in tears of her hurt but offered forgiveness to the killer and expressed God's love toward the one who'd killed her mom

Anthony Thompson said on behalf of his murdered wife: '...we would like you to take this opportunity to repent. Repent. Confess. Give your life to...Christ, so that He can change it. And change your ways, no matter what happens to you, you'll be ok. Do that, and you'll be better off than what you are right now.' The next lady, Felicia Sanders, whose son was killed, said with great emotion: 'We welcomed you Wednesday night in our Bible study with open arms. You have killed some of the most beautiful people that I know. Every fiber in my body hurts, and I will never be the same...as we said in Bible study "we enjoyed you." But may God have mercy on you.'

Granddaughter of Pastor Simmons, who died at age 74 at the hands of hate, said despite Dylan's hate, 'This is proof, everyone's plea for your soul that *they* lived in love and their legacies will live in love, so hate won't win.'

One article said: ‘Even the most cynical atheist had to have been in awe as the family members of the murdered faithful rose one after another in the Charleston courtroom and proved the power of their own faith in the face of crushing loss. “I forgive you,” Nadine Collier said through tears to the accused killer of her mother ... Roof has reportedly told police that the group was so welcoming and manifestly decent that he nearly decided to abandon his murderous plan ... Roof seems to have understood in his moments of indecision that these warmly devout people of the Bible study group [challenged] the lie of his racism. He may have sensed that the faith filling their lives might also fill his own...Tywanza Sanders is said to have told him, “You don’t have to do this.” Roof is said to have replied as if he were also trying to convince himself...a champion of the white race about to start a race war...His next words were...language of white supremacists.

... Sanders could have sought to flee. He instead placed himself between the gun and his aunt. He was killed and now his mother stood in the court, addressing the killer [of her son and asked God’s mercy upon him. The last family member to speak in the courtroom said she was struggling with her anger over her murdered loved one, but said] “We have no room for hating, so we have to forgive,” she told Roof. “I pray to God for your soul.” [the reporter concludes]...Even atheists had to see divinity in these families built by love. God was there in that courtroom if He has ever been anywhere.’¹⁶

Jesus said this is how the world knows we are His, by our love. Gospel love can shine in our hate-filled world. If those people could love a hating racist mass murderer, we have no excuse not to show love to people we struggle to love. Greater is He who is in you than He who is in the world, and greater love has no one than He who laid down His life to make friends of enemies.

If they could stand up in the courtroom and speak those words of love, and if young people in Oregon could stand up in a classroom to a killer with a gun asking if they were Christian, by His love we can stand up for Jesus as soldiers of the cross, lifting high the gospel banner of the love of our Savior

¹ <http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2015/10/02/christians-oregon-harper-mercerc-roseburg-umpqua-column/73198490/>

² http://www.bostonherald.com/news_opinion/local_coverage/2015/10/college_shooter_to_victims_have_god

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<http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/october/targetingofchristians.html#bmb=1>

⁴ <http://www.cnn.com/2015/10/10/us/oregon-shooting-matthew-downing/index.html>

⁵ <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/oregon-college-shooting/oregon-shooting-umpqua-community-college-gunner-talked-religion-n437051>

⁶ <http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2015/10/02/christians-oregon-harper-mercerc-roseburg-umpqua-column/73198490/>

⁷ <http://www.newsmax.com/t/newsmax/article/694549>

⁸ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Jn 15:18.

⁹ James Montgomery Boice, *Gospel of John*, 4:1191.

¹⁰ <http://www.ar15.com/archive/topic.html?b=1&f=5&t=296262>

¹¹ <http://www.sermonaudio.com/new.asp?keyword=hate>

¹² Kenneth O. Gangel, *John*, vol. 4, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 298.

¹³ <http://tapesfromscotland.org/Audio8/8322.mp3>

¹⁴ <http://assistnews.net/index.php/component/k2/item/1092-god-is-present-in-the-aftermath-of-roseburg-shooting>

¹⁵ <http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=729151129232>

¹⁶ <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/06/20/charleston-shooting-families-proved-grace-wins-out-over-hate.html>