



# GRACE

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI ◇ DEO ◇ GLORIA

## THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

### Sermon Notes

#### *The Vine and the Branches, Part III*

John 15:17-16:4

May 7, 2006

### BACKGROUND

- During this discourse, Jesus has taught His disciples multiple truths concerning the nature of genuine discipleship.
  - If we love God [and we love Him by first knowing Him through His Word and the power of the Holy Spirit], then we will obey His commandments; if we obey His commandments, we will abide in His love; if we abide in Him [as the branches abide in the vine], we will bear much fruit; some of the fruit that we will bear will be new converts as we spread the Gospel. All of this results in Christ's joy abiding in us.
  - Yet, it does not end here, as the proceeding discourse will make clear. As we abide in Christ, and become more like Him, the world will hate us. Therefore, the fruit, love, joy, etc. that Jesus has spoken of will occur **in light of persecution**.

### Verse 17

- Jesus, once again, states, "...I command you, that you love one another."
- This Verse transitions the reader from the characterization of the people of God [that they love one another – meaning, in this context, fellow Christians] to the characterization of the world – that they hate Christ and His followers.

### Verses 18-19

- Here, Jesus begins to explain the reality of the world's hatred towards Him and His followers.
- One of the main reasons for this is to prepare His disciples for what is to come, that they may not be surprised when they are severely persecuted.
- This is fully consistent with 1 John 3:13, where the Evangelist states, "Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you."
- Here, Jesus says, "If the world hates you..." – of course, the understanding is that the world **will** hate the disciples.

- ❑ May we take heart when we are persecuted, since someone has already experienced this – Jesus Christ Himself.
- ❑ As D.A. Carson states, “Christ’s followers will be hated by the same world, partly because they are associated with the One who is supremely hated, and partly because, as they increase in intimacy, love, obedience and fruitfulness depicted in the preceding verses, they will have the same effect on the world as their Master.”
- ❑ Christ continues by explaining, “...the world would love its own.”
  - This is a basic truth of humanity – we love that which is most like ourselves, we reject what is different.
  - How much more true is this of the One [and His followers] who stands in direct contrast to the world.
- ❑ Furthermore, Christ’s reiterates His words concerning the choosing of His disciples – “I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.”
  - Not only are the disciples different from the world – they used to be a part of it.
  - “Former rebels who have by the grace of the king been won back to loving allegiance to their rightful monarch are not likely to prove popular with those who persist in rebellion.” Carson
  - This is always true when it comes to sin – we want people to participate in the same sin that we do so that we will not feel guilty.

### Verses 20 -21

- ❑ Jesus, now, quotes from John 13:16, “A slave is not greater than his master.”
- ❑ The setting of the original statement was in the context of washing one another’s feet. If Jesus, who is both Master/Teacher and Lord, washed the disciples’ feet, how much more so should the disciples wash one another’s feet.
- ❑ In the same way, here, if Jesus, who, again, is Master and Lord, was persecuted, indeed, crucified, how much more so should the disciples expect similar persecution if they are intimately associated with Him.
- ❑ Then, Jesus makes is very clear as to why the disciples **will** be persecuted: it will be “for My name’s sake...”
  - What is fascinating here is that, to the world, persecution is a terrible thing – something that must be avoided. In fact, persecution is often a source of great discouragement.

- However, this is not so for the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. When we are persecuted “for His name’s sake” **it should actually strengthen our faith** – as He has told us we would be persecuted.
- The Christian life is so radically different than anything the world knows. As we abide in Christ, and become more like Him, the world will hate us, because of Him who abides in us. This should actually give us strength and joy, that we become more committed to Christ, thus causing our persecution not to lessen, but actually to increase.
- When we, as humans, face difficult times, to include persecution, our reaction is often to ask, “Why me?” Yet, as Christians, if we are not being persecuted, we should ask ourselves the question, “Why?” For it could be that we have compromised so greatly that the world sees little to no difference between us and itself.
- We are called to be different – **holy** – and the world will hate us for it.
- But Christ offers something the world never can – peace and joy in the midst of the persecution!
- However, let us not, as many Christians often do, claim that we are being persecuted for Christ’s sake, when in actuality, the world is reacting to our pride, arrogance, and even abrasiveness.

#### Verses 22-24

- Now Jesus says, “If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin.”
- This does NOT mean that, had Christ not come, the world would be perfect.
- Rather, it means that Jesus, as the perfect revelation of the Father, the ultimate and final fulfillment of the Old Testament and the Law, has come and exists as the standard by which all men shall be judged – absolute perfection. Therefore, when the world rejects Jesus Christ, it has no excuse for its sin. NOTE: Because true believers are so closely associated with Christ, to reject His disciples is, in a sense, to reject Christ.
- Now, in Verse 23, Jesus says, “He who hates Me hates My Father also.”
- Therefore, if people hate us, it is because they hate Christ, and if they hate Christ, they hate the Father, because Jesus Christ perfectly reveals the Father.
- Notice, also, that the world is NEVER NEUTRAL with respect to Christ. The world is not “annoyed” by Christ, it does not see Christians as “nuisances” – The world HATES them both.
- As Martin Luther said, “If our Gospel was received in peace, it was no Gospel.”

- ❑ Once again, apart from the sovereign act of regeneration, the world will hate and persecute true followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- ❑ Now, in Verse 24, Jesus expands upon Verse 22, “If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin...”
  - First of all, the “works” of Christ are not only His miracles, but all of His activities; indeed, He fulfilled the entire Old Testament. Ultimately, the “works” of Christ include His perfect life, sinless death, resurrection, and ascension.
  - Every “work” that Jesus did was necessary to fulfill the Law and atone for the sins of His people.
  - Therefore, to reject Christ is to reject His “works”, to include His crucifixion. Such rejection leaves one spiritually dead and without excuse.
- ❑ Notice, as well, that Jesus Christ is **unique**. The works that He did “no one else did.” The reason for this is that **ONLY** Jesus Christ was **FULLY** God and **FULLY** man. Therefore, **ONLY** Christ could have accomplished the works necessary for the salvation of his people.
- ❑ Not only this, but in His works Jesus so perfectly revealed the Father, that to reject Christ is to reject the Father; to hate Christ is to hate the Father.

#### Verse 25

- ❑ Lest any of the disciples think that the hatred of Christ (and themselves) was an “unexpected” aspect our Lord’s ministry, Jesus makes it clear that it was in complete accord with the Word of God, quoting, “THEY HATED ME WITHOUT A CAUSE.”
- ❑ This is taken from either Psalm 35:19 or Psalm 69:4.
- ❑ It is most likely from Psalm 69, as this has often been regarded, even by ancient rabbis, as Messianic.
- ❑ The point is that if David, who was merely a sinful man, was hated “without cause”, how much more does this apply to the sinless Messiah.
- ❑ Yet, notice the **irony** here – Jesus quotes from, what He calls “their Law.” In so doing, Jesus is pointing out that the Law that the Jews claim to embrace is the very Law that condemns them.

#### Verses 26-27

- ❑ Now, in light of the discussion on persecution, Jesus introduces His third “Paraclete” passage.
- ❑ Jesus says that “when the Paraclete comes...He will testify about Me...”
  - Yet, notice again the intimacy of the Persons of the Trinity: the Paraclete, who is the **Spirit of truth**, will come, sent by the Son, proceeding from the Father, testifying about Christ.

- As the Spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit [the Paraclete] will never contradict the Scriptures or the Son.
- Yet, in Verse 27, Jesus states that the disciples will also testify concerning the Son.
- There is a bit of irony here: When the Holy Spirit, that is the Spirit of truth, comes, He will testify through the disciples, of Christ. However, this will lead the world to persecute the disciples, as the world hates Christ. Yet, the very Person [the Holy Spirit] who enabled the disciples to “remain” in Christ and testify of Him, thus causing them to be persecuted by the world, will comfort them, giving them joy and peace, amidst their persecution.
- Jesus concludes this Chapter by telling the disciples one of the reasons they will testify of Him – they have been with Him “from the beginning” – a reference to the beginning of His earthly ministry.

## Chapter 16

### Verse 1

- Now, Jesus tells His disciples why He has told them all of these things: “so that you may be kept from stumbling.”
- One of the greatest “temptations” that Christ’s followers will face is to stop bearing witness to Him when the persecution begins. Yet, He tells them that the fact that they do face persecution is a clear sign that they are being obedient to the commands of Christ.
- As one scholar (Temple) states, “it is hard to believe that a cause is truly God’s when it seems to meet with no success, and all power is on the other side.”
- “But,” as Leon Morris writes, “Jesus prepares them so that they will not be taken by surprise and overcome in the collapse of a starry-eyed optimism.”
- Christians so often ask one another, “How is your church [or ministry] doing?” Of course, what we mean by this is, “How quickly are you growing in number?” Maybe a more biblical question we should ask one another is, “When is the last time you have been persecuted for the name of Christ?”

### Verses 2-3

- Jesus continues by specifically describing the type of persecution the disciples will face for His name’s sake.
- They would be “outcasts from the synagogue.”
- To be “put out of the synagogue” was equivalent to excommunication from the local synagogue.
  - It marked one of the severest forms of social, political and religious ostracism, especially for a person of influence, such as a member of the Sanhedrin.

- ❑ Not only, does Jesus say, will the disciples be “outcasts from the synagogue” – they will be killed.
- ❑ Even more, they will be killed by people who believe they are “offering service to God.”
- ❑ **It is one thing to be persecuted by people who outwardly say they are enemies of God; yet, the most difficult persecution is, likely, that which comes at the hands of those who claim to love God. This is the type of persecution that Jesus promises His disciples.**
- ❑ There is strong evidence to suggest that some rabbinic authorities taught that the killing of “heretics” was an act of worship (*Numbers Rabbah* 21.3 (191a)) - “whoever sheds the blood of the godless is as one who offers a sacrifice”
- ❑ Also, in the Mishnah, homicide was encouraged against individuals convicted of certain offenses (*Sanh.* 9:6).
- ❑ There is a strong sense of irony here: “the killers think they are serving God in killing Jesus; [yet it is] Jesus who offers perfect service to God [in His sacrificial death].” Morris
- ❑ Likewise, “the death of Christians by persecution truly is an offering to God.”
- ❑ It is also important to realize that, although Jesus is, in this context, speaking of religious persecution, being forced out of the synagogue would lead to a more severe form of persecution – at the hands of the Roman Empire.

“The church endured little persecution as long as it was looked upon by the authorities as a part of Judaism, which was considered a legal sect. But as soon as Christianity was distinguished from Judaism as a separate sect and might be classed as a secret society, it came under the ban of the Roman state, which would brook no rival for the allegiance of its subjects. It then became an illegal religion and as such was considered a threat to the safety of the Roman state. The state was the highest good in a union of the state and religion. There could be no private religion...

Christians consistently refused to offer incense on the altars devoted to the genius of the Roman emperor, with whom the welfare of the state was inextricably mingled in the minds of the people during the imperial period from Caesar Augustus to Constantine. If one would sacrifice on these altars, he could then practice a second private religion. The Christians would make no such sacrifices, and consequently it was thought that they were disloyal. The Christians also held most of their meetings at night and in secret. To the Roman authority this could mean nothing else than the hatching of a conspiracy against the safety of the state.”

*Christianity Through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church,* by Earle E. Cairns

- ❑ Yet, amidst this persecution, this was one of the many means that God used to spread the Gospel message. As Christians were “put out of the synagogue” they carried the Gospel message with them wherever they went.

- ❑ As the early Church Father, Tertullian, once said, “The blood of the Martyrs is the seed of the Church.”
- ❑ Once again, however, Jesus makes it clear as to why His disciples will be persecuted: “because they [those who persecute (and kill) them] have not known the Father or Me.”

#### Verse 4

- ❑ Finally, Jesus tells His disciples why He has spoken these things to them: “so that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them.”
- ❑ In a strange sort of way, the persecution will prove Jesus, once again, to be God – as He predicted it would happen. Persecution of the disciples will, then strengthen, not lessen, their faith.

Recall the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:11-12:

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

or from the Apostle Paul in Philippians 1:29:

“For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him,”

Also, James 1:2 states, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds...”