

Hated by the World, Part 1 (John 15:17–21)

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Introduction

John 15:17 transitions from the second to the third part of the vine discussion: “*These things I command you, so that you will love one another.*” The command was first given in John 13:34. In 15:9, Jesus assured His own that the basis of their love for each other was His love for them and that love was the love His Father had for Him. His own were to abide in His love by keeping His commandments as He had kept His Father’s (v. 12). Love is characterized by sacrificial self-denial to promote the welfare of others. Self-denial, then, is to be patterned on Jesus, who “*laid down his life for His friends*” (v. 13).

Closing the second portion, Jesus reminded them, “*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide*” (v. 16).

The fruit yielded by one’s abiding in the Vine includes *character* (holiness), *conduct* (righteousness), and *converts* (evangelism). This must be the focus of everyone who professes to follow Christ. The “*ifs*” in the succeeding verses define the real condition of the supposed follower. Those who love Christ, keep His commandments (14:15)—abide in Him (15:4) and abide in His love (15:9).

I. The Shock Removed

1. To remove the shock of persecution that the disciples will face after His departure, Christ warned them of the hostility they would face due to their relationship to Him.

- a. The reason for persecution centers on God’s giving a people to Jesus “*out of the world*” (John 17:6). Now His own are *sojourners* and *exiles* (1 Peter 1:11) *in* the world but no longer *of* the world.

These sojourners constitute a new community of love that stands in opposition to the wicked community of the world. Since the world hated Jesus, His own would also be hated. In light of this, they would need to encourage one other in a place of refuge, the *church* (Hebrews 10:22–24).

- b. The hostility of the world began when the Father sent His Son into the world to redeem a people for His name. Coming into the world, Jesus called those He would redeem *out of the world*, but He would also leave them in the world (John 17:11). In answer to Jesus’ prayer, God allowed them to be persecuted.

Jesus left His own *in* the world to witness the gospel to those *of* the world. Persecution works for the good of His people due to their natural proclivity to seek comfort in the world.

“The mission of the Christian is fearless faith in this deadly world. To a true Christian, there is no death, only a change of address.”—Simon Liu

2. There is no neutral ground when it comes following to Jesus, but not following Jesus is to side with this lost and hateful world (James 4:4).

Following Jesus will be very costly; one must die to self and surrender everything to the will of God. This means that he must give up all that he previously cherished. He may even have to die physically for Jesus (Luke 9:23–27; 14:25–27, 33). Thus, we must not preach the gospel to any without first warning prospective disciples of the cost. Such warning may discourage false professions. This is how Jesus worked and so must we.

II. What Is the World?

The term, *world* has varied uses in the New Testament.

1. *World* in Scripture, refers to the physical realm—the *created order*—(earth) as distinguished from the unseen spiritual realm. *Earth* and *world* are often use synonymously as in Psalm 24:1, 2. The Hebrew term translated *world* specifically refers to the inhabited region of the earth.

The Greek word translated *world* is *cosmos*, describing an apt and harmonious arrangement or constitution, order, or government of the inhabitants of the earth—the ungodly multitude alienated from God and hostile to Christ and His cause.

2. Although originally created and declared to be “*very good*” (Genesis 1:31), through Adam’s sin, the world became *corrupt* (Genesis 6:5). Thus, *world* has come to mean the society of wicked men in rebellion against God. The Bible teaches the total depravity of man (Jeremiah 17:9).

Jeremiah 17:5 uses language familiar to the Jews of his day to remind that they supplanted Yahweh for “*trust in man*” and then thought to *deceive God*, as if He did not know, that their trust was really in *God*, not man.

3. Thus, God determined to restore the earth by saving the world. He began this process by calling out of the world a people for His name (Acts 15:14). The restoration required God’s sending His Son into the world. As sin came into the world (Romans 5:12), so did the sin-bearer (1 Timothy 1:15:).

In Conclusion

1. The *world*, then, stands in opposition to Jesus because He is King and Lord over the world. In answer to Pilate (representing the world), who asked Jesus, “*So you are a king?*” (John 18:37), Jesus answered, “*You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.*” The hostility of the world is also seen in Pilate’s snide response, “*What is truth?*” (v. 38). The world operates by lies and deception—darkness to hide its wickedness. Jesus brought the truth—light to expose the evil and bring salvation.

Jesus taught there are two kingdoms that overlap in this age: a kingdom of this world and a kingdom of heaven. Christ-followers have dual citizenship. Living in the tension of two kingdoms, the primary focus of believers should be the church’s being the church. It is God’s business to transform the culture of this world into the kingdom of our Lord.

2. There is a real sense that saints are more like the Israelites in exile in Babylon than those in the promised land. God instructed the captives sent to Babylon to build houses, plant gardens, have families and multiply. “*Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare*” (Jeremiah 29:5–7). This is the believer’s work in the world today. These earnest calls for transformation assume that because Christ will renew the whole *cosmos*, then the saints’ job as Christians is to work toward that goal.
3. At the same time, saints must beware of getting too comfortable with the world and into its scheme. John warned, “*Love not the world [cosmos]*” (1 John 2:15). Paul also exhorted the church at Rome, “*Do not be conformed to this world [aion]*” (Romans 12:2). *Aion* means *age* or time period. It is used only twice in the NT, here and 1 Peter 1:14: “*As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance.*” The saints have been “*called out*” of the world to be transformed into Christ’s likeness in holiness. They must not be worked into its *scheme* but rather be transformed by the Word.