



Our passage of scripture today is about hatred and how a Christian should respond. Has anyone ever hated you for your Christian faith? Since we all come at this topic with different personal experiences, I'll give you a few examples so we're all on the same page.

Stephen, a deacon in the early church, delivered a sermon to the people of Jerusalem, recorded in Acts 7. See if the response of the people sounds like hatred. *"Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him"* (v. 54). The mob seized him, dragged him out of the city and stoned him to death.

At one of America's Ivy League schools, grad students seeking their PhD's sit before a board of professors and undertake an oral exam. Some of the questions are on the topics of gender, sexuality and marriage. If a student's answers align with a Christian world view, they will not receive their PhD. This is a well-known fact in the program. And if you are a younger professor in that program, which is how I got this information, and you somehow got through the interview process undetected, which she did, you will never get tenure.

Authorities in Uzbekistan continue to pressure churches and religious groups, often fabricating evidence to punish or limit Christians' ability to practice their faith. Christians recently (July 2011) have been subjected to excessive fines, false accusations and literature confiscations.

With these three examples in mind, let's read what Jesus tells His disciples in John 15:18–25.

"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. 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. 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. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they

have seen and hated both me and my Father. But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.'"

Two words that are used repeatedly in this passage need to be defined: **hatred** and **world**. Our verses from the Bible today use the word **hatred** seven times and **world** five times.

What is Hatred?

Hatred is used seven times in these verses. Followers of Jesus are told to expect to be hated and reminded that Jesus was hated too.

"Hatred" is defined by Webster as: *a) intense hostility and aversion usually deriving from fear, anger, or sense of injury; b) extreme dislike or antipathy: loathing <had a great hate of hard work>.*

"Hatred" in the Greek in these verses means to detest (especially to persecute). Hatred then could be thought of in this way: actively working against a person's best interests.

This is in contrast with Love which is actively working for the best interests of a person.

Who or What is the World?

World means the world system, the sum total of everything here and now; the world's values—power, money, pleasures, passions and aspirations. The world is the value system that Satan is working diligently to manifest and develop. So the world is seen and experienced in an individual person or a group of people like those Ivy League professors or the authorities in Uzbekistan. However, these people are merely the ambassadors of the world system that Satan is trying to spread. We need to always keep in mind that the person is not our enemy; the world system is.

Expect to be hated

No doubt these words from Jesus meant a lot to the disciples as they faced harsh persecution and death. According to traditions and the Bible, eight of the 12 apostles died as martyrs. At least two of the apostles, Peter and Andrew, were crucified.

Why does the World hate followers of Jesus?

We have been called out of the world (verse 19). Because of this we, by our new nature, reveal the values of God's Kingdom. This exposes people's rebellion against God. They hate us because we are different and we expose the darkness of their lives.

Because of our identification with Christ (verses 19–21). At every point that the world resists Jesus, we will experience hostility.

The authority of Jesus. Jesus claims to be the ultimate authority over everyone and everything. That’s quite a boast. Jesus said in John 14:6, **“I am the way, truth and life.”**

The new standards of Jesus. Jesus’ words and actions became the standard against which everyone is compared. Before Jesus came people could get by with relative goodness. A little arrogance, but not too much. A little selfishness, but not too much. A little meanness, but not too much.

James Boice said, “Before we had Christ’s works of comparison, our works looked pretty good. But next to his deeds, even the best of ours looks shabby.” Because of the crystal clear life of Jesus, every person’s spiritual bankruptcy is revealed. The world hated Jesus for this.

Jesus wants all of His followers to know that they will be hated as well. AW Tozer said, “Christians must understand most emphatically that the world around us is in conflict with the Word within us.” Jesus is the Word. Jesus is in us. Jesus will shine within us. The world around us is in conflict with the Word within us.

I asked you earlier, has anyone ever hated you for being a Christian? There are a lot of reactions we give to hatred and persecution: Fight back. Stay quiet. Hold a grudge. Gossip. Pray.

Jesus, our King, our authority, our Lord, provides instructions for us when we are persecuted.

“But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness (a fruit), because you have been with me from the beginning. I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you. “I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you” (John 15:26–16:4).

Did you see it? Did you see what Jesus wants His followers to do in the face of hate and persecution? In verse 27 Jesus says to bear witness. Before I get into a description of what bearing witness means, let me explain the implications of v. 2. Jesus tells the disciples that they will be put out of the synagogue. Being put out of the synagogue would be a devastating social and financial experience. Former friends would shun them, considering them worse than a pagan. They were exiled from their family. They would lose their job or if self-employed, their customers. They were refused the right of an honorable burial.

This is an extreme form of hatred and persecution that most of us have never experienced. If the disciples, through the power of the Holy Spirit, were able to bear witness under such harsh treatment, we can bear witness in whatever circumstances we are facing today.

What does it mean to “bear witness”? *To confirm or attest something on the basis of personal knowledge or belief, bear witness, be a witness.*

In the book of John “witness” means, not specifically the facts of Jesus’ history, but to the person of Jesus as the eternal Son of God. To bear witness meant to tell other people about Jesus’ saving power. To bear witness means to evangelize.

Remember I asked you earlier, has anyone ever hated you for being a Christian, and I gave you some reactions. I wonder if evangelism came to your mind?

Let me tell you about Julie. I worked with Julie years ago. One day at lunch I asked her how she became a Christian. When she was in college she was a foul-mouthed, abrasive, chimney-smoking young woman. A Christian from her dorm invited her to a Friday night Campus Crusade for Christ Bible Study in their dorm building. Julie said, “no” in a very impolite way.

As it so happened, Julie would normally be outside smoking and talking with friends on Friday nights as this Christian girl would walk by on her way to Bible Study. Every week, Julie was invited to come. Every week, Julie told her “no,” in a very impolite way. At the eleventh invitation, Julie stubbed out her cigarette and said, “Ok. I’ll come.”

Julie described to me her dread and extreme discomfort as they approached the room where this Bible Study was held. Everyone knew her as outspoken and abrasive on this small liberal arts campus; she smelled like smoke and she didn’t have a Bible. Her Christian friend told her she was welcome, just as she was. After that first night, Julie was intrigued and strangely interested. In three months, she surrendered her life to Christ.

She told me, “I’m so glad that girl didn’t stop inviting me to Bible Study, although I made fun of her every week.” Do you know what Julie was doing as her job? Organizing high school mission trips to Eastern Europe. She made it possible for thousands of Christian high schoolers to bear witness in Eastern Europe.

Now some of you might be really inspired and ready to go. Some of you might be feeling badly because you’ve not been bearing witness like you ought to. You feel like you’ve been failing and you don’t know how to make a change, to bear witness. Let me give you two bits of encouragement.

The Holy Spirit is bearing witness too. You are not alone. Your words are super-charged by the invisible hand of the Spirit. The Spirit convicts a person’s heart. **“All scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in**

righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). **“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you”** (John 14:26).

Life Issues books ask four great questions: Is the Bible God’s Word? Do non-Christians really deserve eternal punishment? Is Jesus Christ the only way to God? What is required to have eternal life? In my experience, people are much more interested to talk about the words of Jesus than the answers to these four questions.

I talk about what I’m excited about—a movie I saw recently, a golf match I’m playing, something I learned in a book recently. Why should our conversations about Jesus be any different?

Conclusion

Let’s think about the honor Jesus is giving here. The Holy Spirit will bear witness and Jesus has extended the invitation and expectation of bearing witness to us as well.

Similarly, but more spectacularly, Jesus has appointed you to a task: to take the gospel of salvation to the world. And when we do, we help rescue people from the world system they’re caught in.

He tells us that it will be difficult. He tells us to expect hatred. But He also tells us that the Holy Spirit will be with us and working in people’s hearts.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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Catalog No. 1359-6FC

This message from Scripture was preached on Sunday, August 14, 2011 at Central Peninsula Church
1005 Shell Boulevard | Foster City CA 94404 | 650 349.1132 | www.cpcfc.org. Additional copies available on request.