

THE GOSPEL OF

JOHN

Can You Feel
the Hate?

INTRODUCTION

John 15:18-27

Hate is a weird word. When we are young, we use it to talk about the things that we really don't want to eat—"I hate peas!" About the same time, our mothers tell us not to use that word. When we hit our teen years, "I hate you!" becomes a weapon aimed at parents, would-be friends and former romantic interests. We "hate" rival sports teams (and their fans), smells, events, and sometimes even words (I hear "moist" is particularly offensive to some).

But somewhere along the way we come face to face with real hate. Pit of your stomach, make your blood boil, can't see straight kind of hate. It burns. It can be disconcerting when we face the hate within ourselves, when we come face to face with the reality that hate can live inside us too, sometimes in ways we would never have expected, in ways that make us feel ashamed.

Not all hate is bad, of course. Paul tells us "Hate what is evil; cling to what is good" (Rom. 12:9). God himself says there are things that he hates:

There are six things that the Lord hates,
seven that are an abomination to him:
haughty eyes, a lying tongue,
and hands that shed innocent blood,
a heart that devises wicked plans,
feet that make haste to run to evil,
a false witness who breathes out lies,
and one who sows discord among brothers.
Proverbs 6:16-19

When it is directed at us and we truly recognize it for the first time, hate can come as a complete shock. It causes confusion and disorientation, perhaps panic. Certainly fear. "What did I do to deserve this?"

People hate for a variety of reasons: ethnicity, religion, the things we have done (real or imagined), out of ignorance or just plain meanness. Today, as we study John 15:18-26, we come face to face with the reality of hate directed at those who follow Jesus and what that hatred will bring.

OPEN IT

1. Think of a time when you were on the receiving end of hate, what was the occasion and how did you feel?

READ IT

John 15:18-27

EXPLORE IT

2. Who hates believers?
3. Why do they hate?
4. What is the result of their hatred?
5. Who is the real object of their hatred?
6. Who is Jesus sending and what will he do?

APPLY IT

As a reminder, this passage is part of Jesus' farewell discourse to his disciples. They have eaten the Last Supper together, Judas has left to betray Jesus, Peter's denial has been foretold, and Jesus has told them he is leaving and begun to give them last instructions including his famous statement "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (14:6), he has promised the Holy Spirit and has taught them about the vine and the branches. Now he turns to the hardships that they will face once he is gone. The word "if" in verses 18-19 does not mean that there is any doubt that the world will hate or persecute; rather, it conveys the meaning "since" or "because". Gary Burge summarizes the passage this way:

Essentially Jesus says that discipleship will be a costly endeavor and whoever chooses to follow Jesus must be ready to experience the sort of conflict he has seen and will soon endure. But Jesus will send the Spirit, who will provide a vital function in these conflicts.¹

In the immediate context, "the World" is the Jewish establishment that will arrest Jesus later that night. Writing his Gospel as an old man in modern Turkey, John has seen firsthand that the World includes a great deal more.

7. John has given several examples of the World's hatred for Jesus throughout the Gospel including John 3:19-20 and 7:7. What is the root of this hatred according to these earlier examples?

8. Jesus says, in effect, "they hate you because you aren't them anymore". Why do you think this fact causes the world to hate believers?

¹Gary Burge, John: The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), p. 420

9. In John 9 Jesus healed the blind man and everyone was afraid to speak up because of the Jewish leaders (v.22). Because of his testimony the man was put out of the synagogue (v. 34). How does his story serve as a warning to the disciples and to us?

Jesus reminds the disciples that they do not belong to the World, he has chosen them out of it, so it hates them. D.A. Carson says:

The world loves its own: this is not a sociological remark about inborn suspicion of strangers, but a moral condemnation. The world is a society of rebels, and therefore finds it hard to tolerate those who are in joyful allegiance to the king to whom all loyalty is due. Christians *do not belong to the world*, not because they have never belonged, but because, Jesus avers [i.e., states] *I have chosen you out of the world* 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. Christians cannot think of themselves as intrinsically superior.²

10. What part of Carson's explanation strikes closest to home for you? Why do you think that is?

11. Underlying these verses is the assumption that the World can tell that we are no longer a part of it. What are some ways that we should be noticeably different?

² D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John: The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 525.

12. In verse 20, Jesus refers to the statement he made when washing the disciples' feet (13:1-17). How does that moment speak to the disciples' relationship to him and to one another when persecution comes?

In verse 20, Jesus clearly expects the disciples to be persecuted. The "If" statement at the beginning of the verse is just like the previous, meaning "since" or "because." Scholars disagree on what to do with the next statement:

If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.

It could mean one of two things. Either:

"If they kept my word (and they didn't), then they will also keep your word (so they won't)."

Or

"If they kept my word (and some did), then they will keep yours."

13. Which of the two ways to translate this verse do you think is more likely? Why? Is there a significant difference in your mind?

14. If the latter is correct (and I think this is the better way to understand the verse because even though Jesus is preparing the disciples for persecution here, because we know from his ministry that many *did* listen to and follow him), how is this an encouragement for both the disciples and us as we share Jesus with others?

Jesus tells the disciples that all of this will happen “on account of my name” which basically means “because you follow me and are recognizable as such.” The world does persecute Jesus’ disciples because they “do not know him who sent me”—the Father. In this instance Jesus is referring to people who *think* or *believe* that they do know God. Verse 21 makes it clear that there is a difference between knowing *about* God and actually knowing him. We cannot reduce being Christians to either what we know or what we do.

15. Some people tend toward knowing and neglect doing, others tend toward doing and neglect learning. Which tendency is yours? How do you ensure that you do not neglect the other side?

Verses 22-24 seem, at first glance, to say that if Jesus had not come the World would not be guilty of sin. This would clearly be at odds with Jesus’ teaching elsewhere. D. A. Carson explains:

The idea is not that if Jesus has not come the people would have continued in sinless perfection — as if the coming of Jesus introduced for the first time sin and its attendant guilt before God Rather, by coming and speaking to them Jesus incited the most central and controlling of sins: rejection of God’s gracious revelation, rebellion against God, decisive preference for darkness rather than light Rejection of Jesus’ words (v. 22) and works (v. 24) is thus the rejection of the clearest light, the fullest revelation; and therefore incurs the most central, deep-stained guilt.³

Once again, Jesus’ teaching echoes what happened after he healed the blind man—the religious leaders claimed to see but rejected the sign so Jesus proclaimed their guilt (9:41). This leads Jesus to proclaim that hatred for him is hatred for the Father, an accusation that the religious leaders would have rejected out of hand.

Verse 25 makes it clear that those who reject Jesus and persecute his disciples are not thwarting God’s plan in any way; rather, the very act of their willful unbelief confirms the truth of Jesus’ claims and mission. “They hated me without cause” echoes Psalm 35:19 and 69:4 and is in line with John’s teaching that we love darkness rather than light.

16. What are some ways that religious people today inadvertently reject God?

³ Carson, p. 526

17. What are some ways that we can help those people to see the truth of Jesus on the one hand, and make sure that we do not fall into the same trap on the other?

18. How does this passage reinforce to you both humanity's need and God's sovereignty? Does this passage provide comfort or make you feel uneasy? Why do you think that is?

Verses 26-27 turn to the Holy Spirit and can seem out of place in a discussion about persecution. John has referred to the Holy Spirit in several places in his Gospel, most notably Jesus promised him in chapter 14 (see vv. 16, 26). The ESV uses the term “Helper”, other translations use “Advocate” or “Counselor”. The word in Greek is *parakletos*, which Burge says:

Should be taken as “Advocate”, since it is a judicial title describing someone aiding a legal argument. The Spirit-Paraclete will not only live in the disciples, enabling them to recall the words of Jesus (14:26); now he will become a witness, supporting their trial (either literally or figuratively). The promises of the Spirit in the Synoptic Gospels fit this setting precisely. Jesus said that in the midst of persecution (Matt. 10:16-18) his followers should not worry about what to say since the Spirit will speak through them (Matt. 10:19-20; Mark 13:11). The Spirit will also instruct, “for the Holy Spirit will teach you at the time what you should say” (Luke 12:12). But there is a partnership, for “*you also must testify*”⁴ (John 15:27a, italics added). “You” is emphatic in Greek here, underscoring that we are not permitted a passive role. The disciples are witnesses and the Spirit will bear witness.⁵

19. How does Jesus’ sending of the Holy Spirit to the disciples (and us), help in the middle of persecution? Do you have any concrete examples from your own life when you felt the Spirit’s help?

20. How does the emphatic nature of “you will bear witness” speak to our responsibility as Christians to live like Jesus publicly?

⁴ ESV reads “will bear witness”

⁵ Burge, p. 421