

J. C. RYLE'S NOTES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN
15:17-21

17. These things I command you, that ye love one another. 18. If the world hates you, ye know that it hated me before *it hated* you. 19. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own. But because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. 20. Remember the word that I said to you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they have kept my word, they will keep yours also. 21. But all these things they will do to you for my name's sake, because they do not know him who sent me.

17.--[*These things...love one another.*] The expression "these things" must either refer backwards to what has just been said or forwards to what is going to be said. I prefer the latter view. "I press on you these repeated charges to love one another, because you must expect the hatred of the world. The more the world hates you, the more you ought to love one another and stick together."

18.--[*If the world hates you, etc.*] The object of this verse is to encourage and comfort the disciples under the hatred and enmity of the unbelieving Jews. "Do not be surprised and discouraged if you find yourselves hated and persecuted by an unbelieving world. Do not think the fault is yours. You know, and have seen, and must remember that this same world has always hated and persecuted Me before you, although it could lay no fault to my charge."

The principle of the verse will be found true in every age. It is not the weaknesses and inconsistencies of Christians that the world hates, but their grace. Christians should carefully remember that their spotless and blameless Master was bitterly hated by the world when He was on earth, and they must count it no strange thing if they are treated in the same way.

Hengstenberg thinks that the words "ye know" should be taken as an imperative and not an indicative, like "remember" in verse 20. I doubt this; but the construction of the Greek language makes it an open question.

The Greek word rendered "before" is literally "first." It is the same that is translated "before" in John 1:15 and 30.

19.--[*If ye were of the world, etc.*] In this verse our Lord shows the disciples that the hatred of the world, however painful to bear, is a satisfactory evidence of their state before God. It is like, "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you," and, "Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you." This comes out more clearly if we invert the order of the verse. "The world hates you because you are not like itself but have a different faith and live a different life, and because I have drawn you out of it to be my disciples and apostles. The world always loves what is like itself, and would love you if your standard of faith and

life was like its own. The very hatred of the world, therefore, is a satisfactory evidence that you are my disciples."

Luther remarks: "Towards each other, apart from Christ, the men of the world are as little friends as dogs and cats. In all that concerns Christ, they are unanimous in hatred."

The expression "his own" means literally "its own thing," its own spirit, tone, character, faith, and life.

The whole verse contains rich experimental comfort for true Christians. There are few things that we are so slow to realize as the enmity of natural man against God and all who have anything of God's image. Forgetfulness of it often brings believers into much trouble and perplexity of mind. They do not expect the world's hatred and are surprised when they meet with it. This verse teaches plainly that they ought not to be surprised.

Burgon quotes a saying of Bishop Sanderson: "The godly are in the world as strangers, and in a foreign, yea in an enemy's country; and they look upon the world, and are looked upon by it, as strangers, and used by it accordingly."

20.--[*Remember the word, etc.*] Our Lord continues in this verse the same subject: viz., what the disciples must expect from the world. He reminds the eleven of the things He had said before, when He first sent them out to preach (Matt. 10:24, Luke 6:40). He had always told them that they must not expect to be better treated than He had been Himself. He quotes the proverbial saying that "a servant must not expect to fare better than his master." "Did they persecute Me? Then they will persecute you. Did they keep, mind, and attend to my teaching? As a rule, the great part did not; and you must expect the same."

We ought to observe carefully how strongly this lesson about the world is laid down by our Lord. It was doubtless spoken for all time and with a special reference to believers' slowness to realize it. If there is anything that true Christians seem incessantly forgetting, and seem to need incessantly reminding of, it is the real feeling of unconverted people towards them and the treatment they must expect to meet with. Wrong expectations are one great cause of Christians feeling troubled and perplexed. That word "remember," "do you remember," has a mine of meaning in it.

Gataker, Bengel, and some others think that the Greek word here rendered "keep" means "to observe with a malicious intention to carp at it; but this seems improbable. Whether, however, there is not a latent irony in the sentence is doubtful.

21.--[*But all these things...name' sake.*] Our Lord here tells His disciples that He Himself was the cause of all the enmity and hatred they would meet with. They would be hated on account of their Master, more than on account of themselves.

"These things" must refer apparently to the expression, "hate, persecute, and keep your word."

It may be some comfort to a persecuted Christian to think that it is for his Master's sake that he is ill used. He is "filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ" (Col. 1:24). He is "bearing the reproach of Christ" (Heb. 11:26).

[*Because they do not know Him who sent Me.*] This sentence is elliptical. It means that dark ignorance was the great cause of the conduct of the unbelieving Jews. They did not rightly know God the Father who had sent Christ into the world. They did not know that Christ was the Messiah whom the Father had promised to send. In this state of ignorance, they blindly persecuted Christ and His disciples.

This judicial blindness and hardness of the Jewish nation in the time of our Lord and His Apostles is a thing that ought to be carefully observed by all Bible-readers. (See Acts 3:17, 13:27, 28:25-27, 1 Cor. 2:8, 2 Cor. 3:14.) It was a peculiar judicial blindness, we must remember, to which the whole nation was given over, like Pharaoh, as a final punishment for many centuries of idolatry, wickedness and unbelief. Nothing but this seems thoroughly to account for the extraordinary unbelief of many of our Lord's hearers.

In leaving this passage we should not fail to notice the singular frequency with which our Lord speaks of "the world." Six times he mentions it. We should also notice the singular resemblance between the line of argument adopted in the passage and the line of St. John in the third chapter of his first Epistle. The Apostle writes his Epistle in that part as if he had this chapter before him.