

Exposition of the Gospel of John CHAPTER 53

CHRIST FORTIFYING HIS DISCIPLES

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Transcript

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CHAPTER 53

CHRIST FORTIFYING HIS DISCIPLES

John 15:17-27

The following is an Analysis of the closing section of John 15:— 1. Christians commanded to love one another, verse 17. 2. Christians warned of the world's hatred, verse 18. 3. Causes of the world's hatred, verses 19-21. 4. The greatness of the world's guilt, verses 22-24. 5. The fulfillment of God's Word, verse 25. 6. The witness of the Spirit, verse 26. 7. The witness of Christians, verse 27. The principal Subject in the passage which is to be before us is the world's hostility against Christ and His people. Its hatred is mentioned seven times—solemn witness to its awful entirety and inveteracy. The transition from the preceding section is quite natural and easy. The Lord had been speaking to and of "his own;" now He contemplates "the world." He had just declared that His disciples are His friends; now He turns to describe His and their enemies. He had set before the apostles the proofs of His love for them; now He warns them of the world's hatred. The connection between the last verse of the previous section and the opening one of our present portion is most significant. "These things I command you, that ye love one another." Various motives had been presented for them loving one another, chief among them being the example of His own wondrous love. Now an entirely new and different reason is advanced: Christians need to be united together by the bonds of brotherly affection because the world, their common enemy, hated them. A loving heart would feign discover or induce love everywhere. To be ungratified in that desire and more than that, to be hated, is a hard and bitter lot, the bitterest ingredient in all affliction. Therefore does the Lord here faithfully prepare His disciples for such an experience, that they might not marvel at the world's hostility nor be stumbled by it—"Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you" (1 John 3:13). Graciously did the Savior proceed to fortify His disciples against the storm of persecution which He knew full well would burst upon them shortly after His departure. Charged with such a mission, proclaiming such a message, invested with miraculous powers of benevolence, the apostles might fondly imagine that the world would soon be won to Christ. But they must be prepared for disappointment. Therefore, did Christ arm them beforehand, that their spirits might not be overwhelmed by the bitter malice and opposition which they would surely encounter. There is little or nothing in the Gospel records to intimate that the apostles had

been subjected to persecution while their Master was with them. After the seventy were sent forth, we read that they "returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the demons are subject unto us through thy name" (Luke 10:17). When the scribes and Pharisees were offended because the disciples transgressed the tradition of the elders, eating with unwashed hands, instead of assailing them directly, the complaint was laid before the Lord Jesus (Matthew 15:2). When the Savior was arrested in the Garden, He said to the officers, "Let these (the apostles) go their way" (John 18:8). Even after His crucifixion, they were allowed to go, unmolested, back to their fishing (John 21:23). But after His return to the Father, they too would experience the world's malignity. Therefore did the Lord forewarn them of the treatment which they must expect and would certainly receive at the hands of the ungodly. The warning which the Lord Jesus here gave the apostles is much needed by young believers to-day. The inexperienced Christian supposes that the hatred of the world against him is a reproach. He thinks that he is to blame for it. He imagines that if only he were kinder, more gentle, more humble, more Christlike, the enmity of unbelievers would be overcome. This is a great mistake. The truth is, the more Christlike we are the more shall we be antagonized and shunned. The most conclusive proof of this is found in the treatment which our blessed Savior received when He was in the world. He was "despised and rejected of men." If then the purest love which was ever manifested on earth, if goodness incarnate was hated by men in general, if the brighter His love shone, the fiercer was the enmity which it met with in response, then how can we expect to be admired and esteemed by the world? Surely none will entertain the horrible thought that any of us can surpass the prudence of the Son of God! And how all of this rebukes the popularity which so many professing Christians, yea, and many of the professed servants of the Christ now enjoy! Have we forgotten that severe rebuke, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4)! Solemn indeed are the terms used here. Adulterers and adulteresses are they who seek and enjoy illicit love. In like manner, for a professing Christian—one who claims to love Christ—to seek his delight in the world, to company with the ungodly, is to be guilty of spiritual adultery. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15). "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2). "These things I command you, that ye love one another" (John 15:17). There is something peculiarly searching and heart-rebuking in this. How humbling to find that Christ had to command us to love one another! How humbling to hear Him repeating this command, for He has already given this same commandment to His disciples in John 13:34! And how humbling to find Him here repeating it again, for He had only just said, "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you" (John 15:12)! Was it because He foreknew how little Christian love would be exercised among His people? Was it because He knew how much there is in each of us that is so unlovely? Was it because He foresaw that the Devil would stir up bitterness and strife among His followers, seeking to make them bite and devour one another? Whatever may or may not have been before Him, one thing cannot be denied—Christ has expressly commanded His people to love one another. "These things I command you, that ye love one another." Not only does the insistent emphasis of our Lord upon this world indicate that here is something which every Christian needs to take seriously to heart, but the large place given to it in the Epistles adds strong confirmation. The following commandments of the Holy Spirit through the apostles are but repetitions and expansions of the precept now before us: "Be kindly affectioned one to another" (Rom. 12:10). "Forbearing one another in love" (Eph. 4:2). "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). "Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another" (Eph. 4:32). "If any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye" (Col. 3:13). "See that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently" (1 Pet. 1:22). "Love the brotherhood" (1 Pet. 2:17). "And above all

things have fervent charity among yourselves" (1 Pet. 4:8). "Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous" (1 Pet. 3:8). Envy, malice, ill-feeling, evil-speaking among brethren are a sure proof of the lack of this brotherly love! "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18). Here the Lord introduces the subject of the world's enmity, and He begins by pointing out to His apostles that what they would suffer was only what He had suffered before them; they must not be surprised then at finding themselves in the midst of a hostile people. For their part they must be meek and gentle, living peaceably with all men so far as they would allow them to. They must do nothing maliciously to provoke or warrant the hatred of the world; but if they were faithful to the Lord, they must be prepared for the same evil treatment which He met with. "Ye know that it hated me before it hated you." The word "before" here refers not so much to time as it does to experience. Christ was assuring them that He trode the very same path which they would be called on to follow. He had preceded them in it: "When he putteth forth his own sheep he goeth before them" (John 10:4). How this should comfort us! It was Christ identifying the disciples with Himself. If we belong to the Lord Jesus that is sufficient to arouse the world's rancor. But it is blessed to know that it hates us because of Him, not because of ourselves! It is the repulsion of human nature for what is of God. And nowhere is the awful depravity of fallen man more evidenced than in his hatred of that which is pure, lovely, good, holy. "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 hateth you" (John 15:19). Here the Lord proceeds to state the various causes of the world's hatred. Two are given in this verse: first, His people are no longer "of the world;" second, Christ had "chosen them out of the world." The two are really resolvable into one: it is because Christ has chosen us out of the world that we no more belong to it. We no longer share its spirit, are no more actuated by its aims, are not now governed by its principles. Note the Lord's emphatic emphasis here: five times in this one verse does the Lord mention "the world"! Do you, He seems to ask, desire the smiles of men, are you anxious to stand high in their favor? That would be tragic indeed; that would prove you also belonged to the world. In John 8:23, Christ had declared of Himself, "Ye are from beneath; I am from above; ye are of this world; I am not of this world." Now, for the first time, He predicates the same thing of His disciples. It is striking to note that this was not until after John 14:31, and Christ had (figuratively) taken His place—identifying the disciples with Himself in that place—on resurrection ground. It is only as united to a risen Christ that we are taken (positionally) out of "the world." "I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." It is remarkable that the first reason Christ here gives as to why the world hates believers, is because of their election. "The world cannot endure the thought of God's sovereignty and electing love" (Mr. F. W. Grant). The world is enraged at the very idea of Christians being the singled-out favorites of God. Strikingly was this demonstrated almost at the beginning of our Lord's public ministry. After announcing that the prophecy of Isaiah 61:1, 2 found its fulfillment in His mission, He went on to say how that while the heaven was shut up for three years and a half, during the subsequent famine, though there were many widows in Israel, God, in His sovereign grace, sent Elijah unto none but the widow of Zarephath; and though there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha, none of them were cleansed, though God in His sovereign mercy healed Naaman, the Syrian. The response to our Lord's words was very shocking. "And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong" (Luke 4:28, 29). It is just the same to-day. Nothing so stirs up the enmity of the carnal mind as to hear of God's absolute sovereignty: choosing some, passing by others. Then how much worldliness there must now be in many professing Christians! It should be noted in the example cited above that it was the religious world which was so enraged against Christ: it was the synagogue-worshippers that sought to murder the Savior,

because He pressed upon them the fact that God had compassion on whom He pleases. Nor have things changed for the better. Let any servant of God to-day expound the truths of Divine election and foreordination, and he will be assailed the most fiercely by those who claim to be the people of God. So, too, with believers in general. Let their lives attest their calling, let their walk make it manifest that they are not "of the world," because "chosen out of it," and the bitter enmity of the ungodly will indeed be excited. But let us not be cast down at this, rather let us see in the hostility of unbelievers a precious evidence that we are one with Him whom the world cast out. "Therefore the world hateth you." It will not hate mere professors. The man who is conformed to this world, who takes part in its politics, who shares its pleasures, who acts according to its principles, even though he bears the name of Christ, will not be ostracised or persecuted. The woman who is conformed to this world, who follows its fashions, who enjoys its society, who works for its reformation, will not be shunned by it. The world loves its own. But those who walk in separation from the world (and they are few in number), those who follow a rejected Christ, will know something of what it means to enter into "the fellowship of his sufferings" (Phil. 3:10). God has said, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). But let such recall and be cheered by those words of our Savior, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matthew 5:10, 12). "Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord" (John 15:20). How touching is this! Christ would have us forget no words spoken by Him! He here reminds the apostles of what He had said to them a little previously, though in another connection—showing how full His utterances are, designed for various applications. His purpose here is to press upon us that it is a mark of genuine discipleship if we share the experiences of our Master, encountering the hatred of the world. "If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also" (John 15:20). The "if" looks back to the same word at the beginning of John 15:18 and 19. If you are My followers, My friends, then must you have fellowship in My sufferings. They have persecuted the Lord, and just so far as they live and act accordingly, they will also persecute His servants. The world may boast of its liberal principles; it may for a time tolerate a lukewarm Christianity; but, let the people of God be out and out for Him, and the secret hatred of the heart will soon manifest itself. When the "I have chosen you out of the world" becomes a practical reality, then the world's rage and ban will be displayed. But after all, what is the world's hatred in comparison with Christ's love! And yet, as has been said, "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" (Bishop Ryle). "If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also." There seems to be a note of irony here. The Lord had spoken nought but the unadulterated truth of God, yet the world had not kept His sayings. And why? Because His sayings condemned them. "For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved" (John 7:20). "The world cannot hate you (His unbelieving brethren); but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil" (John 7:7). And just so far as we proclaim the truth of God, so will men (in general) reject our message! "They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us" (1 John 4:5, 6). "But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me" (John 15:21). Here the Lord gives the deepest reason why His disciples would be hated by the world. "For my name's sake" means, of course, on account of it. It was because they would represent Him, acting as His ambassadors, that men would persecute them. Christ would grant

His people the high privilege of sharing His sufferings: "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you" (1 Pet. 4:14). It is the confession of Christ's name which arouses the enmity of depraved hearts. May we, like Moses, "esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt"—the world (Heb. 11:26). "Because they know not him that sent me": far from this ignorance affording an excuse, it was inexcusable, because wilful. "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin" (John 15:22). Here is an example of where the words of Scripture cannot be taken in their absolute sense. When our Lord declared of the Jews that if He had not become incarnate and spoken unto them "they had not had sin," He does not mean that they would have been without sin in every sense. The chief design of the first three chapters of Romans is to establish the fact that all the world, Jew and Gentile alike, were "guilty before God." Christ was speaking in a comparative sense. Compared with their immeasurable guilt of rejecting the Lord of glory, their personal sins were as nothing. Similar instances where things are represented absolutely, though intended in a comparative sense, are frequent in Scripture. For example: "All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing" (Isa. 40:17). "So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase" (1 Cor. 3:7). There had been sin all along, and the governmental dealings of God with men clearly evidenced that He took account of it. But evil as man had shown himself all through his history, the coming of Christ to the earth brought sin to such a head, that all that had gone before was relatively speaking, a trifling thing when compared with the monstrous evil that was done against incarnate Love. It is a question of the standard of measurement. There are a number of passages which clearly teach that there will be degrees of punishment meted out to those who are lost: Matthew 11:22; Hebrews 10:28, 29, etc. The degree of punishment will be determined by the heinousness of the sins committed, and that will be decided by the degree of light sinned against. When One who was more than man came into the world, the Divine dignity of His person, the love and light which He manifested, brought in a new standard of measurement. Christ was here speaking according to the glory of His person. It will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of judgment than for Capernaum. And why? Because the latter turned its back upon the King of kings and Lord of lords. The principle here enunciated by the Savior is very solemn in its application, and one which we all do well to take to heart. Spiritual privileges carry with them heavy responsibilities: "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required." (Luke 12:48)! To dwell in a land of open Bibles and preached Gospel, places men on a very different footing before God than the heathen who have never heard of Christ. Judgment will be according to the light enjoyed! The mere fact that men knew the way of truth, and walked not therein, will only increase their condemnation. To receive Divine instruction and not improve it, is, as Christ here plainly declares, to leave men without any cloak (or "excuse") for their sin. "He that hateth me hateth my Father also" (John 15:23). The Lord here furnished proof that the sin of despising Him involved guilt of unparalleled magnitude. Christwords were not only His own words, but the Father's also. He and the Father were one. The idea of some that they can acceptably worship the Father while rejecting His Son is a deceit of man's depraved heart and a lie of the Devil. "The Jews professed that they loved God, and that on the ground of that love they hated Christ; the God however, whom they loved was not the true God, but a phantom which they named God. The fact that they rejected Christ, in spite of all His words of spirit and truth, showed them to be the enemies of the Father" (Hengstenberg). "He that hateth me hateth my Father also." Very solemn is this. In the previous verses the Lord had shown that the principal reason why the world would hate His disciples was because of their oneness with Himself. Now He shows that the reason why the world hated Him was because of His oneness with the Father. Christ revealed the Father. He was the express image of His person. In Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. He that saw Him, saw the Father also. His doctrine was the

truth of God. His life revealed the perfections of God. His laws expressed the will of God. To dislike Him, then, was proof positive that they hated God. It is a most fearful fact, but one most clearly revealed in Scripture, that men in their natural state are "haters of God" (Rom. 1:30); their minds being "enmity against God" (Rom. 8:7). It is this hatred of God which causes people to reject Christ and dislike Christians. Conversely their rejection of Christ demonstrates their hatred of God. Christ is the test of the state of every human heart! "What think ye of Christ?" honestly answered, reveals whether we are His friends or His enemies. There is no God in the universe except the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and if men do not believe in, love, worship and serve the Son, they hate the Father. Just as faith begets love, so unbelief begets hatred. "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father" (John 15:24). How decidedly does the Lord Jesus place Himself above all the other messengers of God that had preceded Him! The words "they had not had sin" have the same force here as in John 15:22. If Israel had not enjoyed such privileges, they had not contracted such guilt. If they had not heard Him who spake as never man spake, and if they had not witnessed works such as never man performed, their criminality in the sight of God would have been so much less that, in comparison with their culpability now that they had heard and seen and believed not, had been as nothing. It is to be noted that Christ first mentioned what He had spoken unto them (John 15:22), and they referred to the works which He had done among them. "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin, but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father." "The presence and testimony of the Son of God had the gravest possible results. It was not only an infinite blessing in itself and for God's glory, but it left men, and Israel especially, reprobate. Law had proved man's weakness and sin, as it put under the curse all who took their stand on the legal principle. There was none righteous, none that sought after God, none that did good, no, not one. The heathen were manifestly wicked, the Jews proved so by the incontestable sentence of the law. Thus every mouth was stopped, and all the world obnoxious to God's judgment. But the presence of Christ brought out, not merely failure to meet obligations as under law, but hatred of Divine goodness come down to men in perfect grace... Sin before or otherwise was swallowed up in the surpassing sin of rejecting the Son of God come in love and speaking not merely as man never spoke, but as God had never spoken." "But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause" (John 15:25). Terrible indictment of Israel was this. "There was nothing in Christ to provoke hatred in any but morally disordered, depraved minds. Nothing in His character, it was faultless; nothing in His doctrines, they were all true; nothing in His laws, they were holy, just and good. He never had done the world any harm: He had spent His life in bestowing favors on men. Why, then, did they hate Him, why did they persecute Him, why did they put Him to death? They hated Him because they hated His Father" (Dr. John Brown.) "But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause." Here the Lord was tracing the world's enmity back to its true source. He had given no cause for it; it must therefore be attributed to their desperately wicked hearts. The Lord was further fortifying His disciples. They must not be surprised nor offended at the bitterness and malice of the ungodly. His conduct had been mild and benevolent; yet they hated Him. Let us see to it that we give men no "cause" to hate us. Let their enmity against us be provoked only by fellowship with Christ: "It is enough for the disciple that he be as his Master, and the servant as his Lord. If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household!" (Matthew 10:25). "But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause." No doubt Christ was also anticipating an objection here. How is such hatred possible? Why does God permit it? The Lord answers by saying, This hatred of the world is but the fulfillment of God's Word, and therefore of His inscrutable counsels. So little do the wicked affect by their malice, they only

fulfill the Scriptures—while they draw down upon themselves the judgments which other passages therein announce. In quoting here from "their law," Christ showed that the written Word testified against Israel! "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me" (John 15:26). The connection here is apparent. The Lord had been warning the disciples of the opposition they would meet with from that kingdom over which Satan is "the Prince." But that only distresses the more their already saddened hearts, therefore did their tender Master revert again to His original promise—the one promise repeated most frequently in this Paschal Discourse—that the Divine Comforter would come to their relief. It was presupposed in John 15:20, 21 that His disciples would be hated, like Himself, on account of their word. He predicted their fate to them as His witnesses. It was obvious that they should think, But how shall we poor, weak men persist in our testimony, yea, even bear it in the face of such predicted hatred? He therefore confirms to them their vocation, and predicts to them with equal clearness that they shall bear Him testimony in the future (John 15:27). "Not of themselves, however, and in their own human persons: the Paraclete (the Comforter) will conduct the cause. He then, however, returns to the former again, and consoles them by the emphatic assurance that they might not stumble at this: I have now (more clearly than ever before) foretold to you both the coming of the Spirit as a Witness against the hatred of the world, and at the same time the continuance of that hatred in spite of His testimony" (Stier). "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me." That the Spirit is here said to "proceed from the Father" (a statement which has split the Greek from the Roman "Church," into whose differences we shall not here enter) is supplementary to what the Lord had said in John 14:26. There the Comforter was to be sent in Christ's name: here He proceeds from the Father. The two statements placed side by side, bring out the unity of the Godhead. This additional word also shows that the Spirit was not exclusively subordinate to Christ, as some have argued from John 14:26. "He shall testify of me," amplifies His former word in John 14:16, "another Comforter." The Spirit would further Christ's interests, and be unto the disciples (only in another way) all that Christ would have been unto them had He remained on earth. "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me." "Here the Comforter is viewed as sent by the ascended Christ from the Father, and consequently as witness of His heavenly glory. This is an advance on what we saw in the previous chapter where Christ asks and the Father gives the Paraclete to be with them forever, sending Him in His Son's name. Here the Son Himself sends, though of course, from the Father. The Spirit of truth is thus the suited Witness of Christ as He is above" (The Bible Treasury). "Whom I will send" brings out the glory of the exalted Savior in a most striking way. "And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning" (John 15:27). Here the Lord explains to the disciples how the Spirit would testify and of what it would consist. He would not make any corporeal manifestation of Himself as had the Son, but He would bear witness in and through the disciples. He would testify that which they had already seen in Him, and that which they had already heard from Him—nothing besides, essentially different or new. Thus it will be seen that the two "testimonies" of John 15:26 and 27 are not separate and independent, but natural and harmonious. "And ye also shall bear witness." Marvellous grace was this. Neither hostility nor hatred had quenched the compassion of Christ. The world might cast Him out, yet still would His mercy linger over it. Before judgment ultimately descended on the world, a further witness to Himself should be given it, a witness which has already continued for over eighteen centuries! May Divine power enable every real Christian to witness faithfully and constantly for our absent Lord. May we by lip and life bear testimony, in season and out of season, to His excellency, and to Him as our sufficiency. The following questions are to aid the student on the opening portion of John 16:— 1. What is the central theme of

verses 1-11? 2. What is the meaning of verse 1? 3. What does the last clause of verse 2 go to prove? 4. What blessings would "remembrance" bring the apostles, verse 4? 5. Why did the apostles ask "Whither goest Thou?" verse 5? 6. Why "expedient" for Christ to go, verse 7? 7. In what way does the Spirit "reprove the world," verse 8?

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