



The Gospel of John - Chapter Fifteen

III John 13:1-20:31 - The Farewell Discourse and the Passion Narrative (continues)

III.a John 13:1-17:26 - The cleansing and instruction of the new messianic community and Jesus' final prayer (continues)

Summary of Chapter Fifteen

Jesus announces himself as the vine and the Father as the vine-grower, with his disciples as the branches in the vine. Those who follow Jesus and do not yet fully believe in him will be cut out of the vine and discarded; those who are faithful will be pruned in order to bear much fruit and thereby to glorify God.

If believers keep Jesus' commandments they will remain in his love which will bring them much joy. They are also commanded again to love one another in the way that Jesus had loved them. Jesus also states that he regards his disciples not as his servants but as his friends.

Jesus then goes on to explain that because the world has persecuted and hated Jesus it will respond in the same way to his disciples. However, there are those who did respond to Jesus call on their lives and, likewise, the disciples will find that there will also be people who will believe the Gospel when they hear it from the disciples. This is because Jesus will send the Holy Spirit who will testify on behalf of Jesus.

III.a.ii John 15:1-17:26 - Final Teaching of the Disciples

Jesus continues with his farewell discourse, referring to himself as the true vine and his disciples as the branches that are to remain in the vine. He then goes on to explain why the world has hated him and why it will hate the disciples also.

Jesus then informs them that they still have much to learn for they were not yet in a position to fully understand what Jesus purpose on earth had been. After they receive the Holy Spirit they will be taught many more things and will be able to comprehend all things about Jesus, the Father and their work in extending the Kingdom of God on earth.

Jesus realises that they will be full of sorrow at their parting from him, particularly because it comes about because of his death on the Cross. However, he tells them also that their sorrow will soon turn to joy because he knows that death will not hold him for long and he will reveal himself to them following his resurrection.

Jesus concludes his farewell discourse with a magnificent prayer to his Father. He starts by praying for himself, then for the eleven disciples whom he has chosen and then for all who would become the church because of the teaching of the other disciples he had trained for taking the Gospel into the world.

III.a.ii.1 John 15:1-17 - Jesus the True Vine

Jesus' allegory of the vine and the branches is at the very heart of the Farewell Discourse (13:31-16:33). The OT frequently uses the vineyard or vine as a symbol for Israel, God's covenant people, especially in two 'vineyard songs' in Isaiah 5:1-7 and 27:2-6. However, Israel's failure to produce fruit resulted in divine judgment. Jesus, by contrast, is the true vine, and his followers who abide in him will produce much fruit.

The image is not a parable, since it is not a story, but rather an extended, that is, basically an allegory, for all the details have significance. The main point of the image is clear enough: the intimate union of believers with Jesus. The disciple's very life depends on this union. As branches, believers either bear fruit and are pruned to bear even more fruit, or do not bear fruit and are thrown away and burned.

¹ 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower.

John 15:1

This is the last of Jesus' seven I am sayings in this Gospel; refer to the comments made on 6:35 and the full list in the Supplementary Material on the website. The previous six statements focused on Jesus as the life-giver and had included an invitation to come to him and to believe in him. Now, however, Jesus is speaking to those who have already come to him, and so his charge is that they remain in him. The earlier theme of life is now developed in terms of intimate union with Jesus, a sharing in his own life. Thus, this is a fitting conclusion to the I am statements.

Vine and its close association to vineyard ties in with the OT descriptions of Israel as God's vineyard; therefore, true contrasts Jesus with OT Israel, reinforcing John's theme that Jesus is the true Israel. This claim corresponds to his break with the temple at the end of Chapter 8 and his forming a renewed people that began in Chapter 9 and came clearly to the fore in Chapter 10. Israel's place as the people of God is now taken by Jesus and his disciples, the vine and its branches. Psalm 80 links both the vine and God's Son: *<<Turn again, O God of hosts! Look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this vine, the stock that your right hand planted, and for the son whom you made strong for yourself. They have burned it with fire; they have cut it down; may they perish at the rebuke of your face!>>* (Psalm 80:14-16).

This is not a rejection of Judaism as such, but its fulfilment in its Messiah. The identification of the people of God with a particular nation is now replaced with a particular man who incorporates in himself the new people of God composed of Jews and non-Jews. Israel as the vine of God planted in the Promised Land is now replaced by Jesus, the true vine, and thus the people of God are no longer associated with a territory.

The vine-grower refers back to Isaiah's first vineyard song, where God is depicted as tending his vineyard, only to be rewarded with wild grapes, refer to Isaiah 5:1-7. This theme is also reflected in: <<*You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land*>> (Psalm 80:8-9), and: <<*Yet I planted you as a choice vine, from the purest stock. How then did you turn degenerate and become a wild vine?*>> (Jeremiah 2:21). The fruitfulness of those in Christ contrasts with the fruitlessness of Israel.

The role of the Father as the vine-grower continues the theme of Jesus' dependence on and subordination to the Father, and also emphasises again the contrast between Jesus' relationship with God and that of his opponents.

² He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit.

John 15:2

Bears no fruit seems to indicate that the person symbolised by such a branch is not a true believer (v.6 and v.8). In that case, in me is just a loose connection needed to make the metaphor of a vine work, reflecting a claim to be Christ's that is not genuine and not implying actual regeneration or true belief. This then would be one of several verses in John showing that not all who follow Jesus for a time and hear his teaching are genuine believers: <<*Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him*>> (John 6:66), as well as 13:10-11 with reference to Judas Iscariot.

Others understand every branch to represent true believers who are unfruitful for various reasons. In favour of this view is the fact that Jesus says such branches are in me, and that seems parallel to being 'in Christ', as only true believers are. However, these unfruitful branches appear to be the same branches that are: <<*thrown into the fire, and burned*>> in v.6, as they are in: <<*Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire*>> (Matthew 3:10), which seems clearly to be a picture of final judgment.

The divine vine-grower does two things to ensure maximum fruit production:

1. He removes unfruitful branches.
2. He prunes all the others: <<*Ground that drinks up the rain falling on it repeatedly, and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it produces thorns and thistles, it is worthless and on the verge of being cursed; its end is to be burned over*>> (Hebrews 6:7-8).

He removes. The Greek verb *airō* can also mean ‘lifts up’ in certain contexts, and some use this to argue that this means God ‘lifts up’ unfruitful branches from the ground so that they will become more fruitful. This interpretation is taken by those who think the branches represent true believers who are not fruitful. But this sense seems less likely because the unfruitful branches in v.6 are: **<<thrown into the fire, and burned>>**, which is an image of final judgment.

He prunes gives a picture of painful but necessary removal of some interests and activities in order that the remaining branches may **bear** even **more fruit**. The word translated **prunes**, Greek *kathairō*, often means ‘to clean’, and has the same root as the adjective *katharos*, translated ‘clean’ in v.3.

Although God allows his creation to reject him, his own disposition towards them is love, a love that continues to pursue even those who reject him, refer to the comment on 13:26. Those who are worried about the assurance of their salvation should find comfort in the character and actions of God. Their fretting over themselves is itself a preoccupation with self that must be pruned away, for it inhibits their relationship with God: their bearing of the fruit of eternal life.

Fruit is an image for good results coming from the life of a believer, probably in terms of bringing benefit to the lives of others and advancing the work of God in the world: **<<Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold>>** (Mark 4:8). Paul provides a different image of fruit as changed character: **<<By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things>>** (Galatians 5:22-23), **<<For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light – for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true>>** (Ephesians 5:8-9), **<<And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that on the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God>>** (Philippians 1:9-11).

³ You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.

John 15:3

You have already been cleansed. Jesus’ teaching and the disciples’ acceptance of that teaching has cleansed them spiritually, as Jesus confirmed shortly after washing his disciples’ feet: **<<Jesus said to him, ‘One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.’ For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, ‘Not all of you are clean’>>** (John 13:10-11), and: **<<Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word>>** (Ephesians 5:25-26). In essence, what is stated in vv.2-3 is a summary of Chapter

13, where Judas was cut off from God and the rest of the disciples were cleansed for him.

⁴ Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.

John 15:4

Abide in me means to continue in a daily, personal relationship with Jesus, characterised by trust, prayer, obedience (v.10), and joy. The Father prunes and cleanses, and the Son has cleansed by his word, showing the Son's oneness with the Father. But the disciples themselves must make an effort to remain in this relationship. Remaining is not simply believing in Jesus, although that is crucial, but includes being in union with him, sharing his thoughts, emotions, intentions and power. In a relationship both parties must be engaged. The divine must take the initiative, providing the means and the ability for the union to take place, but it cannot happen without the response of the disciple.

As I abide in you is a phrase without an explicit verb in the original, but it probably is an abbreviated way of saying, 'See that I abide in you'; that is, 'Safeguard your relationship with me so that I continue to abide fully in you'. Refer to the comments made on 8:31 and 1 John 2:6. The in terminology in the present passage refers back to OT covenant theology, including prophetic texts regarding a future new covenant, such as: <<*I will dwell among the Israelites, and I will be their God*>> (Exodus 29:45), <<*I will place my dwelling in your midst, and I shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people*>> (Leviticus 26:11-12), and: <<*Now let them put away their idolatry and the corpses of their kings far from me, and I will reside among them for ever*>> (Ezekiel 43:9).

The repeated references to bearing fruit (v.5 and v.8) underscore that this is God's primary purpose in creation: <<*God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth'*>> (Genesis 1:28), and in redemption (v.8 and v.16). The OT prophets envisioned a time when God's people: <<*shall blossom and put forth shoots, and fill the whole world with fruit*>> (Isaiah 27:6b). Refer also to Hosea 14:4-8.

⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.

John 15:5

Apart from me you can do nothing does not mean 'nothing at all' for unbelievers of course carry on their ordinary activities of life apart from Christ; rather, it means 'nothing of eternal value', or an inability to produce spiritual fruit.

⁶ Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

John 15:6

Whoever, i.e. any such person, who does not abide in me is an unbeliever who does not have a personal faith in Christ. The verse echoes Ezekiel 15:1-8, where a vine failing to produce fruit is said to be good for nothing but the fire: <<**Ground that drinks up the rain falling on it repeatedly, and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it produces thorns and thistles, it is worthless and on the verge of being cursed; its end is to be burned over**>> (Hebrews 6:7-8), as referenced earlier on.

Is thrown away like a branch. Since fruit refers to sharing in the life of God and the activities that naturally come to expression when that life is present, this throwing away follows by definition. It is impossible to be united to God and remain ignorant of him and not manifest his own characteristic love. In such a case the branch is cut off and cast out to be burned. Although their judgement does not come immediately they wither, which indicates their lives will never be fulfilled: <<**A mortal, born of woman, few of days and full of trouble, comes up like a flower and withers, flees like a shadow and does not last. Do you fix your eyes on such a one? Do you bring me into judgement with you?**>> (Job 14:1-3).

Such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. This verse helps to confirm that God does not necessarily take immediate judgemental action against transgressors. Those who are apart from Christ will live out their lives on earth but there will come a time when they will be judged: <<**Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire**>> (Revelation 20:14-15).

Fire is a common Jewish and biblical symbol for divine judgment, for example: <<**See, the name of the Lord comes from far away, burning with his anger, and in thick rising smoke; his lips are full of indignation, and his tongue is like a devouring fire**>> (Isaiah 30:27), <<**But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgement; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, "You fool", you will be liable to the hell of fire**>> (Matthew 5:22), and: <<**Then he will say to those at his left hand, "You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels"**>> (Matthew 25:41). Some take this fire to imply loss of reward for true believers, not eternal judgment for unbelievers, but this does not fit as well with the image of branches being entirely burned up by a fire. Refer also to the comment on v.2.

⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

John 15:7

Two conditions are given for answered prayer: abiding in Jesus, and his words abiding in believers, thus transforming their thinking. Elsewhere Jesus says that believers must ask in his name, i.e. in accord with his character and for his glory. If God's people truly abide in Jesus, they will desire what he desires and will pray according to his words, and those prayers will be pleasing to him. Therefore he

says: it will be done for you: <<Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you>> (Matthew 7:7).

⁸ My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

John 15:8

The Father is glorified not by praise and worship alone but by his followers also bearing much fruit for the advancement of his Kingdom on earth. Here again, fruit bearing is evidence of being true believers, or being Jesus' disciples, and the authority given to them that brings glory to God: <<*When the crowds saw it, they were filled with awe, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to human beings*>> (Matthew 9:8).

⁹ As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.

John 15:9

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. The other side of the mutual indwelling is the disciples' remaining in Christ, which is now described as their remaining in his love. Jesus describes this love as like the love with which his Father has loved him, as confirmed in: <<*I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me*>> (John 17:23). The Father is the source and pattern of all love so, as always, Jesus is doing that which he receives from the Father. Jesus' disciples must remain in his love, and they do this by obeying his commands (v.10).

Abide in my love. Mutual love between believers and Christ is another element of this abiding relationship.

¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

John 15:10-11

If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love. For the disciples to remain in Jesus' love for the Father, therefore, they must share in Jesus' obedience. Their obedience is itself the fruit of their remaining in Jesus because it is a characteristic of his love: <<*Whoever says, 'I have come to know him', but does not obey his commandments, is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist; but whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may be sure that we are in him: whoever says, 'I abide in him', ought to walk just as he walked*>> (1 John 2:4-6). Such obedience is not to be equated with drudgery; it is all about joy, as expressed by David: <<*I delight in the way of your decrees as much as in all riches*>> (Psalm 119:14). The OT prophets envisioned a period of great end-time rejoicing, for example: <<*It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we*

have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation>> (Isaiah 25:9), <<Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away the judgements against you, he has turned away your enemies. The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak. The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing>> (Zephaniah 3:14-17), and: <<Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey>> (Zechariah 9:9). God threatened judgment if his people would not serve him with joyfulness and gladness of heart: <<Because you did not serve the Lord your God joyfully and with gladness of heart for the abundance of everything, therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the Lord will send against you, in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and lack of everything. He will put an iron yoke on your neck until he has destroyed you>> (Deuteronomy 28:47-48).

I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. Jesus confirms his own obedience to the Father's will and the reward he has received for doing so.

That my joy may be in you. Just as Jesus had great joy in obeying his Father even in the midst of opposition, so Christians will have joy in obedience.

That your joy may be complete. John describes the completion of his own joy being able to share what he had come to know about Jesus: <<*We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us – we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete>> (1 John 1:1-4).*

¹² 'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

John 15:12

Love one another. On Jesus' love commandment (vv.12-17), refer to the comments made on 13:34-35.

¹³ No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you.

John 15:13-14

No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. Jesus reveals that this human ideal is in accord with the divine ideal, as was the case

when Judah offered himself in exchange for his youngest brother Benjamin: *<<Now therefore, please let your servant remain as a slave to my lord in place of the boy; and let the boy go back with his brothers>>* (Genesis 44:33). It might be thought that laying down one's life for one's enemies is a greater love. Jesus does indeed have such love for his enemies, but the focus in the present setting is on the disciples and their change of status from servants to friends. Jesus will actually give his life as a ransom for everyone, friend and enemy alike: *<<I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep>>* (John 10:11), and: *<<Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us>>* (Romans 5:7-8).

You are my friends implies a stunning level of comfortable personal interaction with one who is also the eternal, omnipotent Creator of the universe (1:1-3 and 1:10). In the OT, only Abraham: *<<Did you not, O our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel, and give it for ever to the descendants of your friend Abraham?>>* (2 Chronicles 20:7), *<<But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend>>* (Isaiah 41:8), and confirmed in the NT: *<<Thus the scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness', and he was called the friend of God>>* (James 2:23); and by implication Moses: *<<Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Then he would return to the camp; but his young assistant, Joshua son of Nun, would not leave the tent>>* (Exodus 33:11), are called 'friends of God'. Here Jesus extends this privilege to all obedient believers. He uses the Greek term *philoí*, which is related to a verb meaning love and conveys a greater sense of intimacy than does the modern use of friend.

If you do what I command you. Again, the call to discipleship is conditional. Those who wish to follow Jesus must love him, and if they do truly love him they will keep to the teaching he has given them through his word and his example.

¹⁵ I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.

John 15:15

All this talk about obedience seems more fitting for a master-servant relationship, but Jesus no longer calls them servants, Greek *douloi*, but friends. This does not mean that the relationship of servant is not also appropriate for Jesus' disciples. Paul refers to himself as a servant five times, although he also notes that in some senses the Christian is no longer a servant: *<<So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God>>* (Galatians 4:7). Even the worshipers in the heavenly city at the end, who will reign forever and ever, are called God's servants: *<<Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign for ever and ever. And he said to me, 'These*

words are trustworthy and true, for the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place’>> (Revelation 22:3-6). So although the idea of servant is valid, it is limited. Jesus’ point here is intimacy.

I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. Jesus says he has kept nothing hidden, an important claim for the all-sufficiency of Jesus’ revelation of the Father. All that belongs to the Father belongs to Jesus: <<*All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you*>> (John 16:15), and: <<*All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them*>> (John 17:10), and he has passed it all on to his disciples. There is nothing more to be known about the Father apart from Jesus and his revelation.

¹⁶ You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷ I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

John 15:16-17

You did not choose me does not negate the disciples’ willing decision to follow Jesus when he called them, for example: <<*When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him*>> (Luke 5:11), and: <<*As he was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphæus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, ‘Follow me.’ And he got up and followed him*>> (Mark 2:14). Jesus is emphasising that the ultimate factor in determining who would follow him was Jesus’ own choice. The Greek *eklegomai* has the sense of ‘to choose or pick out from a group’, and it clearly has that sense also in v.19.

I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last implies that the purpose of Christ’s choosing people is not merely that their sins be forgiven and they have eternal life but also that their lives be fruitful and productive in fulfilling God’s purposes. For key passages on the doctrine of election, refer to Romans Chapter 9 and Ephesians Chapter 1.

The Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. As previously noted, this does not imply that Christians will receive everything they desire, even the things they believe that God would want them to ask for. Good people become sick and die even when the church is earnestly praying for them and believe they still have much to offer to God in this life. Jesus is referring to those who are in tune with the will of God and, through the prompting of the Holy Spirit, ask for the things that God truly wants. These prayers will be answered. This does not mean that people should cease to pray for things they believe to be good or that God will not answer such prayers. God will answer all prayers, just not always in the way people expect him to!

I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another. This command was given by Jesus in 13:34-35. The primary expression of this fruit that Jesus speaks of here is the love within the Christian community. The fruit that remains is thus the love that flows from, and bears witness to, life in union with

God. This love has come into the world in Jesus and now is to remain in the world in the community of his disciples. This divine love manifested within the church will bear witness to Jesus before the world: *<<As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me>>* (John 17:21b-23), which will enable some to find eternal life and will also reveal the judgment of those who reject it.

III.a.ii.2 John 15:18-16:4a - The World's Hatred

Jesus relates what he has experienced to what the disciples will now experience (vv.18-20). The rejection of Jesus by his opponents has been based in their alienation from God. Jesus now refers to them as the world, since the world is that which is in rebellion against God. The disciples would face rejection by Gentiles as well, but at the moment Jesus has Jewish opposition in mind (16:2). Since the disciples are members of Christ, just as branches are members of a vine, they receive what he receives – both the sunshine and rain of the love of the Father and the storms of the hatred of those who are in rebellion against the Father.

¹⁸ 'If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹ If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world – therefore the world hates you.

John 15:18-19

If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. Jesus provides comfort to those who will face persecution for their faith. Whatever they must suffer, he had suffered beforehand and at the hands of those who should have revered him, as was foreseen by the prophet: *<<Hear the word of the Lord, you who tremble at his word: Your own people who hate you and reject you for my name's sake have said, 'Let the Lord be glorified, so that we may see your joy'; but it is they who shall be put to shame>>* (Isaiah 66:5). This hatred came about early on in the life of the church as John also indicates: *<<Do not be astonished, brothers and sisters, that the world hates you>>* (1 John 3:13).

If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. This is not meant to portray a world that is divided into those who believe and therefore love each other, and those who do not believe but equally love each other. Within the world there are always groups of people who oppose others irrespective of their belief system. Sadly, that can include those who profess to follow Jesus and yet are not clearly loving other believers or indeed their neighbour.

The disciples are included in the world's hatred of Jesus because, like him, they do not belong to the world. They are Jesus' friends, *philoï*, and thus they are not loved, *ephilei*, by the world. Jesus has chosen them and appointed that they to go bear fruit (v.16), and this commission was based on a more fundamental act that he now refers to as choosing them out of the world. They have been transferred into Jesus' Kingdom, which is not of this world (18:36).

Therefore the world hates you. Christians should not be surprised that unbelievers in the world hate them. It follows a pattern seen in the world since Cain murdered Abel: <<*Cain said to his brother Abel, 'Let us go out to the field.' And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him*>> (Genesis 4:8), <<*By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain's. Through this he received approval as righteous, God himself giving approval to his gifts; he died, but through his faith he still speaks*>> (Hebrews 11:4), and: <<*We must not be like Cain who was from the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous*>> (1 John 3:12), and it is seen in the world's reactions to Christ himself. The world's hatred of them is an encouragement to the disciples since it is due to the difference Jesus has made within them. This does not mean the world has no hatred for others besides Christians. Nor does it mean that someone who is hated by the world is necessarily being true to God. But Jesus does say that those who are his disciples are quite distinct from all that is in rebellion against God and should not be surprised when opposition arises.

²⁰ Remember the word that I said to you, "Servants are not greater than their master." If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. ²¹ But they will do all these things to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.

John 15:20-21

Jesus refers his disciples back to his saying, Servants are not greater than their master (13:16). Earlier Jesus was referring to his example of humility in washing their feet. Now this saying applies to his humility in undergoing persecution by the world, even to the point of death.

If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. Jesus concentrates on two items of comparison in particular – persecution and obedience to his teaching. While Jesus' statement 'if they obeyed my teaching' could refer to those who did in fact do so, the present context is focused on rejection, so the idea is probably more like 'they will follow your teaching as little as they have followed mine'. Thus, the disciples are rejected not only because they are not of this world, but also because they are proclaiming a message (v.27). The present text shows the disciples in the role of prophets, meeting the prophets' fate. As the Lord told Ezekiel: <<*But the house of Israel will not listen to you, for they are not willing to listen to me; because all the house of Israel have a hard forehead and a stubborn heart*>> (Ezekiel 3:7). There has been plenty of such hardness within the church as well. Paul goes on to promise persecution for all who follow Jesus: <<*Indeed, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted*>> (2 Timothy 3:12).

Jesus summarises his point thus far by saying: they will do all these things to you on account of my name. Suffering for the sake of Jesus' name is something spoken of frequently in the NT: <<*Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account*>>

(Matthew 5:11), <<*and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved*>> (Matthew 10:22), <<*Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man*>> (Luke 6:22), <<*As they left the council, they rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonour for the sake of the name*>> (Acts 5:41), <<*If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you*>> (1 Peter 4:14), and: <<*I also know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for the sake of my name, and that you have not grown weary*>> (Revelation 2:3). His name refers to his identity and his character as it is made manifest. However, Jesus cannot be understood apart from the Father, so he concludes that the reason they reject him is their ignorance of God: because they do not know him who sent me. Here is the core problem, which introduces the main point of the rest of this passage (vv.22-25). Jesus has been speaking of the connection between the treatment he has experienced and that of his disciples. Now he focuses on his own ministry and its relation to the Father.

²² If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin.

John 15:22

If I had not come and spoken to them. Jesus is indicating that his proclamation of God, and his opposition to the way the world in general was living against the will of God was a key purpose of his earthly ministry. The people will not be able to deny that Jesus has made such a declaration to them: <<*Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them*>> (Ezekiel 2:5).

They would not have sin does not mean all sin: <<*For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*>> (Romans 3:22b-23), but the specific sin of rejecting the supreme revelation of God that came in Christ himself, a sin that is particularly manifested in hating Christ. The OT had foretold that the Messiah was coming, what to expect from him, how he would be rejected and suffer because of the people's hardheartedness towards God, so they have no excuse for their sin.

²³ Whoever hates me hates my Father also. ²⁴ If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not have sin. But now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. ²⁵ It was to fulfil the word that is written in their law, "They hated me without a cause."

John 15:23-25

Whoever hates me hates my Father also. Jesus declares that the Jews' hatred of him fulfils OT Scripture, specifically: <<*More in number than the hairs of my head are those who hate me without cause; many are those who would destroy me, my enemies who accuse me falsely. What I did not steal must I now restore?*>> (Psalm 69:4). This Davidic psalm depicts the figure of a righteous sufferer who is zealous for God but is persecuted by God's enemies for no good reason. Thus Jesus found a precedent for his enemies' hatred toward him in the

antagonism encountered by David. David also implies this in: **<<Do not let my treacherous enemies rejoice over me, or those who hate me without cause wink the eye>>** (Psalm 35:19). In Isaiah 6:9-10 God decrees that the prophet's ministry will have a hardening effect on his own generation. The openness of faith is a gift of grace, but the unresponsive hearer finds that the message only hardens him to God's gracious purposes.

If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not have sin. But now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. Jesus' central assertion is that this ignorance of the Father is culpable because of the witness he has borne in word and deed. He has spoken to them the words of the Father himself (14:10-11), and shown them the deeds of the Father (5:19), deeds unlike anyone else's. If he had not spoken and acted thus they would not be guilty of sin. The disciples are actually experiencing the deep-seated rebellion of sinful humanity against the Father himself. The conflict they experience is a part of something much bigger than themselves. Jesus' words of encouragement here speak directly to his disciples in situations of genuine persecution. He gives them the larger perspective, helping them understand that what they are going through is part of the world's rejection of the Father and the Son.

Such suffering is not outside God's providential care. It corresponds to a pattern found in Scripture, which is what **fulfil** means here. The rejection of Jesus and his disciples is found in the very law to which those rejecting them claim to be loyal, thus further demonstrating their culpability.

It was to fulfil the word that is written in their law. The following quote does not come from the law but from the Psalms: Psalm 35:19 and 69:4 as already discussed, as well as: **<<They beset me with words of hate, and attack me without cause>>** (Psalm 109:3). However, the Jews often referred to the whole of the canon of Scripture as being the Law. Anyway, the whole ethos of the law is that justice should be done and therefore the sentiment is correct.

They hated me without a cause reminds believers that hatred and persecution against Jesus and his followers is often not because of any wrong that they have done but simply because of irrational evil in the hearts of the persecutors.

Thus Jesus is giving the disciples two grounds for assurance, himself and the Scriptures. They should look to him for his example and for what he has said to them. They also gain confidence through what they find in the OT, understood in relation to Jesus. The Scriptures in general, and the Gospels in particular, continue to play such a role in the lives of faithful disciples today.

²⁶ 'When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. ²⁷ You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.

John 15:26-27

The Advocate or Helper is again a reference to the Holy Spirit as commented on in 14:16-17 and 14:26.

Whom I will send indicates that the Holy Spirit will come in new power into the world in obedience to God the Son. But who comes from the Father indicates that the Holy Spirit will also come in obedience to the directions of God the Father. Both the Father and the Son will send the Holy Spirit into the world in new fullness at Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2:1-33; it is also commented on in John 7:39 and 14:16-17.

By referring to the Spirit as the Spirit of truth, Jesus provides yet another contrast with the world, which has rejected him out of error.

He will testify on my behalf reminds believers that when they bear witness about Christ, the Holy Spirit is working silently and invisibly through their words: <<**You are witnesses of these things**>> (Luke 24:48). On he as masculine and personal, refer to the comments on 14:26.

The disciples were chosen out of the world (v.19) and are now said to be witnesses: you also are to testify, because they have been with Jesus from the beginning, referring to the beginning of his ministry. This implies Jesus is speaking primarily to the eleven in these chapters. They have been along for the whole journey to date and so they can tell the whole story, as confirmed when a replacement for Judas Iscariot is chosen: <<**So one of the men who have accompanied us throughout the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us – one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection**>> (Acts 1:21-22). Because the Gospel is not just an abstract message but an account of what God himself has done and said as he was incarnate, history matters enormously and the role of eyewitnesses is crucial, as Luke confirms in the opening passage of his Gospel: <<**Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed**>> (Luke 1:1-4).

These final two verses have introduced the offense which the disciples are to counter in the face of the world's hatred and persecution, with the disciples giving voice to the Spirit's witness against the world.