

WHY THE WORLD HATES BELIEVERS

INTRODUCTION

- We are indeed living in troubling times for believers...we find ourselves increasingly in the crosshairs of the world's opposition
- Spurred on by the media, politicians, and a liberal leftist agenda, Christians are being portrayed as menaces to society and the cause of many of the world's problems
- Christians have always been hated by the world
- Ever since Steven, the first martyr, was killed, Christians have been the object of the world's hatred
- According to Voice of the Martyrs, more Christians were killed for their faith in the 20th century than were martyred in the total history of Christianity
- Justin D. Long: "During [the 20th] century, we have documented cases in excess of 26 million martyrs. From AD 33 to 1900, we have documented 14 million martyrs."
- The "world" (*cosmos*) which is the source of hatred against believers is that system that is opposed to God
- It is the godless world we live in and all that is organized in opposition to God
- The term "world" has several uses in Scripture:
 - the totality of creation, the entire created order (John 17:5)
 - the world of humanity, especially in its lost condition (John 3:16-17)
 - the attitude of materialism that lures people away from God (1 John 2:16)
- But often it refers to the system of evil, made up of Satan, his demons, and unbelievers, who are hostile God and His people
- It is the society of wicked men, under the rule of Satan, who have set themselves against Christ and his kingdom
- The world is the group of sinful people who have organized themselves against God and His people
- The evil world system and all who reject the Word and Son of God lie in the control of the evil one himself

1 John 5:19 ~ We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

- Because the world hates Christ, it also hates his disciples by extension
- Any system that is set against God, set against Christ, and set against His kingdom is a system that is also going to hate those who belong to Christ

John 15:18-19 ~ If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.

- Thus, it is not surprising that there are many warnings in Scripture about this

Acts 14:22 ~ strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."

Philippians 1:29 ~ For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,

2 Timothy 3:12 ~ Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

Hebrews 11:36-40 ~ and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.

1 Peter 2:21 ~ For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps

1 Peter 4:12-14 ~ Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

- It will continue and most likely get worse

Matthew 24:9-10 ~ Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another.

REASONS THE WORLD HATES BELIEVERS

- In 1 Corinthians 1:18-31, Paul describes several reasons why the message of the Gospel is offensive and shameful to the world

Because the Message of the Cross is Stupid

1 Corinthians 1:18 ~ For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

- “foolishness” = *moria* = our English words “moron, moronic”
- It refers to that which is “dull, stupid, foolish, nonsense, what is thought to be foolish”
- It is from a root meaning “to be silly, ridiculous”
- Amplified Bible: “For the story *and* message of the cross is sheer absurdity *and* folly to those who are perishing”
- The idea of God dying on a cross is ridiculous...idiotic...and offensive to the world

An Excursus on Crucifixion

- The victim of crucifixion would be forced to carry the cross beam to the site of crucifixion
- The placard with the charges hung around his neck would be nailed to the upright on the cross
- He would have been stripped of all his clothes...and his arms would be stretched along the cross beam
- Long, tapered iron spikes would be driven through each wrist...and one through both feet
- The cross would be raised and slid into the hole in the ground, causing a jarring blow to the victim
- Over the next few hours or even days, the victim of crucifixion would experience waves of nausea, fever, intense thirst, constant cramps, and incessant throbbing pain from all parts of the body
- Sleeplessness, hunger, dehydration, and infection all took their toll
- Hours of limitless pain, cycles of twisting, joint-rending cramps, intermittent partial asphyxiation would occur as the victim tried to breathe
- Death could be hurried by shattering the legs, but this was not usually done in order to prolong the suffering
- The final humiliation was leaving the naked corpse on the cross to be eaten by the birds

- Death by crucifixion was horrific, slow, and brutal...the most painful and degrading form of death anyone could experience
- For the Romans, it was a barbaric punishment not even inflicted on its own citizens, but rather reserved only for conquered enemies and notorious criminals
- Most Romans viewed it with contempt and disgust, something that most people didn't discuss
- For the Jews, death by crucifixion was even more revolting, being viewed as a curse

Deuteronomy 21:23 ~ for he who is hanged is accursed of God

- These attitudes toward crucifixion created a massive obstacle to the gospel in the first century
- Jews and Gentiles in that day were scandalized by the idea, unable to conceive of a divine king suffering such an ignominy
- Such attitudes became a major barrier to the gospel in the first century and made Christians odious in the sight of the world
- And it is really no different today
- "Looking at the cross – even from the safe distance of two thousand years – we are still rightly repulsed by the horror of Christ's death. And to the mind that has not been illuminated by the Spirit, there is an apparent disconnect between who Jesus said He was and how He died. The humility and shame of the Lord's death is too much for the unrepentant mind to comprehend. The reality of that death being a substitutionary sacrifice for guilty sinners, who must repent and believe or be condemned to hell forever, was, and remains, the least seeker-friendly message imaginable."¹
- Presenting the world with their need to embrace the message of the cross usually elicits the hatred of the world for such a "foolish" idea
- A bloodied, crucified Messiah is too repulsive of an idea for many...and those who hold to it are often scoffed at and ridiculed by the world
- However, we "who are being saved" know without a shadow of a doubt that "it is the power of God" unto salvation (v. 18)
- The cross is powerful wisdom

Because the Cross Demonstrates God's Wrath Against Sin

1 Corinthians 1:18 ~ For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

- Paul notes that those who label the Gospel message as foolish are "those who are perishing" (present participle)
- Their doom is not just future...it is occurring in the present

2 Corinthians 2:15 ~ For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing

2 Corinthians 4:3 ~ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing

¹ John MacArthur, *Stand Firm*, 107.

- “those who are perishing” refers to those who are ruined by sin and on their way to judgment in hell for it
- This is the damning sentence that the cross pronounces on every sinner...they are hopelessly headed for eternal judgment
- The cross is a display of God’s wrath against sin (His love also)
- Christ was crucified to rescue sinners from God’s eternal wrath

- God put His son to death on the cross in order to propitiate (satisfy) His wrath against sin
- The term “propitiation” means to “placate, pacify, appease, conciliate”
- It literally means “to appease God’s wrath...a sacrifice which satisfies the demands of God’s anger toward sin”
- The Good news of the Gospel is that God has poured out his wrath on Someone else: the spotless Lamb of God who sacrificed Himself as our substitute so that God’s wrath might be satisfied against our sin

- God’s wrath is not a capricious, uncontrolled, irrational fury...nor is it malicious, vindictive, or spiteful
- His wrath is a settled indignation against sin...a holy anger that cannot allow sin to go unpunished
- It’s a righteous anger that requires justice for sin and rebellion...a holy aversion to all that is evil
- The reason for such wrath is that God hates sin...He cannot tolerate what is sinful
- He cannot be in the presence of what is sinful...His eyes are too pure to look upon what is sinful
- He cannot have a relationship with what is sinful...He is too holy
- God gets angry at sin because sin destroys lives...sin enslaves people...sin damages what God has made...sin is an offense against his holy character
- Because He is a just and righteous God, sin requires that God’s wrath be poured out as an expression of His indignation against sin and a demonstration of His utter holiness
- “The wrath of God is the inevitable reaction of the divine holiness against sin. Sin is the contradiction of the perfection of God and he cannot but recoil against that which is the contradiction of Himself. Such recoil is his holy indignation.”²
- It is this wrath that is appeased in propitiation

- Sinners who fail to acknowledge God’s wrath against sin and the work of Christ on the cross to propitiate that wrath are in the state of “perishing”
- They are under a damning guilt for crimes committed against God
- Just as some fish heading upstream to spawn are in the process of dying, so too are those who view the cross with contempt

- But sinners in the world don’t want to hear this news
- They resist being identified in these terms, defending themselves instead by claiming to be good people
- “Sinners don’t naturally tolerate the confrontation of their sin or the reality of the judgment and wrath it demands. Out of self-love and self-preservation, they will do everything they can to shout down and silence the truth about their desperate situation and need for the Savior.”³

- However, as believers, we will not soften the edges of what God says about fallen man’s condition
- We will hold fast to what the Scriptures teach concerning sin and its dreadful consequences
- We will say the hard things in order to help sinners understand what they must be saved from

- For this reason, the world will continue to hate believers

² John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 32.

³ MacArthur, *Stand Firm*, 115.

Because the Gospel Confounds the Wisdom of Man

1 Corinthians 1:19-21 ~ For it is written, “I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE.” 20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

- Lost humanity has always considered its wisdom to be superior to God’s wisdom
- Unbelievers have viewed God’s ways to be utter foolishness and their own human reasoning to be far better
- Such was the case with the Jews of Paul’s day...they were consumed with their rabbinic traditions
- They were guilty of twisting the law of Moses to fit their hypocritical lives and being caught up in their own legalistic interpretations
- And such was the case with the Gentiles of Paul’s day...they loved exploring philosophy and intellectual sophistry
- “They believed that the truth is knowable only to those who gained exalted knowledge and elevated insights. They were awash in philosophies and schools of thought vying for supremacy. The pursuit of intellectual complexities and transcendental knowledge was woven throughout their thinking.”⁴
- And such is the case with the world today...fallen humanity
- Paul identifies these people with the terms “wise man...scribe...debater of this age”
- These intellectually elite believe that their accumulated insight, understanding, and wisdom qualify them to solve the world’s problems
- And it is true that God has gifted humanity with keen minds to accomplish a wide variety of successes including putting men on the moon...making airplanes fly...cloning animals...transplanting organs...eradicating diseases, etc.
- However, the reasoning of fallen humanity has nothing to offer when it comes to true spiritual knowledge of God’s ways
- The intuition and insight of fallen men is fickle and unreliable, completely unable to reason its way to God or His kingdom

1 Corinthians 2:14 ~ But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

- Paul makes it clear that natural man cannot (not “does not” or “will not”) understand spiritual things apart from the Holy Spirit
- It is not an intellectual problem...or an educational problem...rather it is a spiritual problem
- God broadcasts His message of salvation on FM, but fallen humanity only has an AM receiver
- This is the way God has ordained it...man’s wisdom does not save...only the “foolishness” of God saves (v. 21)
- “The truth God has revealed for salvation is beyond the natural mind of man...God planned it this way. He ordained that no one could come to know Him through human wisdom.”⁵
- For this reason, the world hates believers since we believe in a Gospel that cannot be comprehended by fallen man...it is not a message that can be embraced by mere human reasoning

⁴ Ibid., 108.

⁵ Ibid.

Because the Gospel Message is a Narrow One

1 Corinthians 1:22-24 ~ For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

- The message we proclaim to the world is a simple and an exclusive one...Christ crucified
- This was the central message of Paul's ministry

1 Corinthians 2:2 ~ For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

- The gospel is offensive to the world because those without Christ refuse to believe that there is only one way to get to heaven
- However, this is the clear testimony of Scripture:

John 14:6 ~ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."

Acts 4:12 ~ And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

- Such a narrow and exclusive message of salvation is hated by the world which prides itself on being tolerant to everyone
- Our age is an one of pluralism...the view that all religions lead to God...the view that denies that Jesus Christ is the world's only Savior
- "In this era of religious pluralism and postmodern relativism, evangelical Christianity has been marginalized as too rigid and too exclusive for public consumption...The world doesn't often clearly delineate religious lines of demarcation. To the untrained eye, most 'Christian' religions look vaguely similar. And so long as the various religions can get along with one another—regardless of their differences—the world is happy to tolerate their faith and practice. Look no further than the widespread ecumenical support for this latest pope, or the constant campaign to rebrand Islam as a religion of peace as evidence of the world's preference for postmodern religious harmony. It's only when God's people make a stand for the objective, eternal truth of His Word that they find themselves in the crosshairs of an otherwise tolerant society. The message is clear: *If you could just take your faith less seriously, we'd be able to get along.* But the inability of God's truth to mix with error means God's people will always be branded as the problem children."⁶
- Sadly, this belief in inclusivism has also crept into the church with many believing that, although Jesus is the only Savior of the world, one does not have to hear and believe the Gospel to be saved
- Inclusivists deny the need for unsaved person to hear about and trust Christ for salvation
- Inclusivists say that, although hearing about and having faith in Christ is the best way, it is not necessarily the only way for sinners to appropriate the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection
- Inclusivists say that only Jesus saves but they maintain that unsaved persons can be saved by Jesus without hearing about and believing in Him
- "Inclusivists believe that appropriation of salvific grace is mediated through general revelation and God's providential workings in human history. Briefly, inclusivists affirm the particularity and finality of salvation only in Christ but deny that knowledge of his work is necessary for salvation. That is to say, they hold that the work of Jesus is ontologically necessary for salvation (no one would be saved without it) but not

⁶ <https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B151021/the-campaign-of-persecution>

epistemologically necessary (one not need be aware of the work in order to benefit from it). Or in other words, people can receive the gift of salvation without knowing the giver or the precise nature of the gift.”⁷

- That is not the gospel...the sinner’s only hope for salvation is to recognize their horrible condition and its serious consequences and to flee to Christ alone for salvation
- Any other message damns the sinner to eternal destruction
- That message is offensive to a tolerant world...and believers who unswervingly hold to it will find themselves in the crosshairs of the world’s hatred
- However, we know the truth...that “Christ [is] the power of God and the wisdom of God” (v. 24)

Because the Good News is Delivered by People the World Doesn’t Respect

1 Corinthians 1:25-28 ~ Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. 26 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; 27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, 28 and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are,

- The world prizes those who are elite, powerful, strong, famous, smart, accomplished, and important
- But not God...He “calls” to Himself those whom the world finds shameful and unimportant
- “calling” refers to God’s sovereign work in drawing lost sinners to Himself by His grace
- Here Paul describes just how unimpressive God’s people are in the eyes of the world:
 - “not many wise” – those who are intellectually elite, gifted with keen minds, and academic capabilities
 - “not many mighty” – those with power, prestige...who wield influence...the movers and shakers
 - “not many noble” – literally “well-born”...with a regal heritage...with a royal pedigree
- Most notable are the kind of people whom God saves:
 - The foolish ones (“the foolish things”) – God rescues those whom the world considers foolish (literally “moronic”) and unqualified and uses them in His work
 - The feeble ones (“the weak things”) – those who are physically unimpressive and perhaps even frail and in poor health
 - The familiar ones (“the base things”) – the opposite of the “noble” (v. 26)...the common person, the losers in the eyes of the world, with a noble pedigree
 - The forsaken ones (“the despised”) – those who are contemptible, looked down on, treated with scorn and animosity...those whom the world says will never amount to anything
 - The forgotten ones (“the things that are not”) – those who are unnoticed...the nobodies
- These are always the kinds of people God chooses to use for His purposes...because when He does great things through them, He gets all the glory, not them

1 Corinthians 4:10-13 ~ We are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor. 11 To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; 12 and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; 13 when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now.

⁷ John Sanders, quoted in Christopher Morgan, Robert Peterson, ed. *Faith Comes by Hearing: A Response to Inclusivism*, 29.

2 Corinthians 4:5-7 ~ For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. 7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves

- God uses the those whom the world views as the scum and the dregs of the earth to deliver His gospel and brings others to Himself
- He uses clay pots and those who are unimpressive to the world to accomplish His purposes
- For this reason, the world despises and rejects God's people
- "Not only do we have a message that is hard to believe, but we also have a message that is delivered by people the world finds hard to respect. The Lord didn't put His gospel into the hands of the most famous, the most notable, or even the most well spoken. He didn't leverage social influences or pop culture icons to proclaim His truth. He chose us. And that lack of star power and name recognition can be offensive to the world...The Lord is pleased to use the nonintellectuals, the unimpressive and insignificant, the unremarkable, and the forgettable to spread His truth."⁸

Because God's Work in Salvation Destroys Man's Attempt to Save Himself

1 Corinthians 1:29-31 ~ so that no man may boast before God. 30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, 31 so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."

- The Gospel eliminates any grounds for boasting in anything we have done to secure our salvation
- No one will get to heaven and brag about what they did to get there
- Jonathan Edwards: "You contribute nothing to your salvation except the sin that made it necessary."
- Salvation, rightly understood, is entirely "by His doing"
- We are made to be "in Christ," a spiritual reality that has been entirely accomplished by God
 - It is His "wisdom" that has done it – it was His wise plan that brought about our salvation
 - It is His "righteousness" that has done it – it is His alien righteousness credited to us via imputation that secures our right standing before God (cf. 2 Cor 5:21)
 - It is His "sanctification" that has done it – it is His work in setting us apart from sin to holiness that has resulted in our salvation
 - It is His "redemption" that has done it – He is the One who initiated paying a ransom to buy us back from slavery to sin
- And when we realize who we were and what we are now, the entire basis for pride and boasting is removed
- The only boasting we can do is in what God has accomplished for us for His glory
- Paul quotes from Jeremiah 9:23-24 ~ Thus says the Lord, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the Lord.
- But the world cannot stomach this reality as it denies its true spiritual condition and wants to claim some merit in salvation

⁸ MacArthur, *Stand Firm*, 115-116.

- “There’s no room in God’s plan of salvation for man’s effort or merit. It’s not about a decision the sinners makes or a change he initiates...The Lord’s sovereign work of salvation is on display throughout His Word...But the heart bent on sin and rebellion cannot tolerate a sovereign Savior. Sinners can’t stomach the idea that ‘our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases’ (Ps. 115:3). Their false sense of autonomy demands that they have some say in their final destiny and that they get some of the credit for ‘inviting Christ into their lives’...Ultimately, the unrepentant heart will not accept what the Bible says about its lost condition...They want to believe there is still some life in the wretched corpse, that they still possess the means to reach out to God whenever they decide to. More than that, they want God to grace all mankind on a curve.”⁹
- For this reason, the world hates the message of the Gospel and all those who proclaim it

THE REAL REASON THE WORLD HATES BELIEVERS

- While the aforementioned reasons really do capture why the world hates believers, there is a more fundamental and spiritual explanation for its vitriol
- It is because they are dead in sin, blind and deaf to the greatest news the world has ever known
- It is not that they won’t accept these truths for what they are, but rather that they can’t

2 Corinthians 4:4 ~ in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Ephesians 2:1-3 ~ And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. 3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

Colossians 1:21 ~ And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds,

⁹ Ibid., 119-120.