

**John 15:18-16:6**  
**November 16, 2025**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Q: Jesus says we should expect persecution because he was persecuted. Is persecution something you ever think about? How do you see “hatred from the world” manifested in today’s culture?

**Transition:** You and I may not experience persecution at the individual level, but I’m sure we have seen how the church body has been persecuted or “hated by the world” because we stand for Jesus. I’m going to bet that none of us want to have to go through persecution. But I’d like to offer a different perspective on persecution by quoting a well-known persecuted pastor in China named Brother Li:

He was asked what their church would be like *without persecution*. He answered, “*The church would not grow and there wouldn’t be revival.*” He continued...

- The people will be caught up with pleasure and the current trends of society.
- The preacher’s love for God and his flock will decrease – they will not have clear vision.
- The Chinese Church has grown and survived *because of persecution*.
- We don’t like persecution, but every time it comes we grow and we fall in love with God more.
- Persecution is God’s inoculation against decay and destruction.
- No persecution means we will have lukewarm Christians with weak spiritual lives.
- In fact, if there is no persecution, the number of churches in China *would rise, BUT their devotion would FALL.*

That is quite a reframe of persecution. We want to avoid it, but it spurs spiritual growth and revival! Let’s read the text and see what Jesus says about this topic. The word “hate” comes up (7) times in this passage. Let’s begin.

**BOOK:**

**The World Hates the Disciples**

<sup>18</sup> “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. <sup>19</sup> If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. <sup>20</sup> Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ (2 John 13:16) If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. <sup>21</sup> They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me. <sup>22</sup> If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin. <sup>23</sup> He who hates me hates my Father as well. <sup>24</sup> If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. <sup>25</sup> But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: ‘They hated me without reason.’ (Psalms 35:19; 69:4) <sup>26</sup> “When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father,

the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. <sup>27</sup> And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.

**16** “All this I have told you so that you will not go astray. <sup>2</sup> They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. <sup>3</sup> They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. <sup>4</sup> I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you. I did not tell you this at first because I was with you.

### **The Work of the Holy Spirit**

<sup>5</sup>“Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ <sup>6</sup> Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief.

### **Process Observations/Questions:**

Q: What stood out to you? What questions do you have? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about man? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit? [Let people engage]

Q: What is your takeaway? [Let people engage]

### **LOOK:**

There is no reason for the believer to stumble (“be offended,” John 16:1) when the world stokes up the furnace of persecution. He should expect persecution, if only because his Lord told him it was coming. (Note especially John 13:19 and 14:29 where the Lord warned His disciples in advance.) Furthermore, they must not stumble when this persecution comes from religious people who actually think they are serving God. The word translated “service” in John 16:2 means “priestly service.”

### **Close in Prayer**

### **Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

***Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 359-361). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.***

This long section—John 15:18–16:16—is tied together by two important themes: the opposition of the world against the church, and the ministry of the Spirit to and through the church. Our Lord had been talking about love (John 15:9–13, 17), but now He is talking about *hatred*; and He used the word seven times. It seems incredible that anyone would hate Jesus Christ and His people, but that is exactly what the situation is today; *and some of that hatred comes from religious people*. In a few hours, the religious leaders of Israel would be condemning their Messiah and crying out for His blood.

Our Lord had openly taught His disciples that one day persecution would come. He mentioned it in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:10–12, 44) and in His “commissioning sermon” when He sent out the disciples to minister (Matt. 10:16–23). In His sermon denouncing the Pharisees, Jesus openly said that they would persecute and kill God’s servants (Matt. 23:34–35); and there was a similar warning given in His prophetic message on Mt. Olivet (Mark 13:9–13).

Throughout the Gospel of John, it is evident that the religious establishment not only opposed Jesus, but even sought to kill Him (John 5:16; 7:19, 25; 8:37, 59; 9:22; also note 11:8). As He continued His ministry, there was a tide of resentment, then hatred, and then open opposition against Him. So, the disciples should not have been surprised when Jesus brought up the subject of persecution, for they had heard Him warn them and they had seen Him face men’s hatred during His ministry.

Until the Lord returns, or until we die, we must live in this hostile world and face continued opposition. How can we do it? What is the secret of victory? It is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit of God in our lives. This is the key section in the Upper Room message about the Holy Spirit and His ministry.

Before we study this passage and see the threefold ministry of the Spirit to the church in the world, we must pause to remind ourselves just who the Holy Spirit is. The Holy Spirit of God is a Person; Jesus referred to the Spirit as “He” and not “it.” The Holy Spirit has a mind (Rom. 8:27), a will (1 Cor. 12:11), and emotional feelings (Gal. 5:22–23).

In John 15:26 all three Persons of the Godhead are mentioned: Jesus the Son will send the Spirit from the Father. Because the Holy Spirit is a Person, and is God, it means that the Christian has God indwelling his body! If we did not have the Holy Spirit within, we would not be able to serve the Lord in this present evil world. We are to walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16), worship in the Spirit (Phil. 3:3), and witness in the Spirit (Acts 1:8).

Christians can stand and withstand in the midst of the world’s hatred because of the special ministries of the Holy Spirit.

### **The Spirit as Comforter Encourages the Church (John 15:18–16:4)**

We should begin by clarifying what Jesus means by “the world,” because the term is used in Scripture in at least three different ways. It can mean *the created world* (“the world was made by

Him”—John 1:10), the world of *humanity* (“For God so loved the world”—John 3:16), or *society apart from God and opposed to God*. We sometimes use the phrase “the world system” to define this special meaning.

For example, when you listen to the radio news, you may hear the announcer say, “And now the news from the world of sports!” Obviously, “the world of sports” is not a special country or planet where everybody lives who is connected in some way with sports. “The world of sports” refers to all the organizations, people, plans, activities, philosophies, etc. that are a part of sports. Some of these things are visible and some are invisible, but all of them are organized around one thing—sports.

“The world” from a Christian point of view involves all the people, plans, organizations, activities, philosophies, values, etc. that belong to society without God. Some of these things may be very cultural; others may be very corrupt; but all of them have their origins in the heart and mind of sinful man and promote what sinful man wants to enjoy and accomplish. As Christians, we must be careful not to love the world (1 John 2:15–17) or be conformed to the world (Rom. 12:1–2).

Jesus pulls no punches when He tells His disciples that their situation in the world will be serious and even dangerous. Note the progress in the world’s opposition: hatred (John 15:18–19), persecution (John 15:20), excommunication, and even death (John 16:2). You can trace these stages of resistance as you read the Book of Acts.

Why does the world system, including the “religious world,” hate the Christian, the one who believes on Jesus Christ and seeks to follow Him? Jesus gave several reasons.

***We are identified with Christ (vv. 18, 20).*** If they hated Him, they will also hate those of us who are identified with Him. In John 15:20, Jesus quoted the statement He had made earlier (John 13:16), and the logic of it is clear. He is the Master; we are the servants. He is greater than we are, so He must receive the praise and glory. But the world will not give Him praise and glory! The world hates Him, and therefore the world must hate us. If with all of His greatness and perfection, Jesus does not escape persecution, what hope is there for us with our imperfections? This principle is seen in some of the other images of the relationship between Christ and His own. He is the Shepherd and we are the sheep; and when they attack the Shepherd, it affects the sheep (Matt. 26:31). He is the Master (Teacher) and we are the disciples, the learners. But it is encouraging to know that when God’s people are persecuted, our Lord enters into their suffering, for He is the Head of the body and we are the members. “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?” (Acts 9:4) Anything that the enemy can do to us has already been done to Jesus Christ, and He is “with us” as we suffer.

***do not belong to the world (v. 19).*** When we trusted Christ, we moved into a new spiritual position: we are now “in Christ” and “out of the world.” To be sure, we are *in* the world physically, but not *of* the world spiritually. Now that we are “partakers of the heavenly calling” (Heb. 3:1) we are no longer interested in the treasures or pleasures of sin in this world. This does not mean that we are isolated from reality or insulated from the world’s needs, so “heavenly

minded that we are no earthly good.” Rather, it means that we look at the things of earth from heaven’s point of view.

The world system functions on the basis of conformity. As long as a person follows the fads and fashions and accepts the values of the world, he or she will “get along.” But the Christian refuses to be “conformed to this world” (Rom. 12:2). The believer is a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17) and no longer wants to live the “old life” (1 Peter 4:1–4). We are the light of the world and the salt of the earth (Matt. 5:13–16), but a dark world does not want light and a decaying world does not want salt! In other words, the believer is not just “out of step”; he is out of place! (See John 17:14, 16, and 1 John 4:5.)

***The world is spiritually ignorant and blind (v. 21).*** If you had asked the religious leaders in Jerusalem if they knew the God they were seeking to defend, they would have said, “Of course we know Him! Israel has known the true God for centuries!” But Jesus said that they *did not* know the Father and, therefore, they could not know the Son (see John 16:3). The religious leaders knew a great deal about Jehovah God and could quote chapter and verse to defend their doctrines, but they did not personally know God.

This was not a new theme for our Lord to discuss, because He had mentioned it before to the religious leaders who opposed Him. “Ye neither know Me, nor My Father; if ye had known Me, ye should have known My Father also” (John 8:19). “Yet ye have not known Him; but I know Him” (John 8:55). Jesus had taught them the Word and had demonstrated His deity in miraculous signs and a godly walk; and yet the religious leaders of the nation were blind to His identity: “The world knew Him not” (John 1:10).

The religious world today claims to know God, but it does not want to bow the knee to Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the only Saviour of the world. Satan has blinded their minds (2 Cor. 4:3–4) and sin has blinded their hearts (Eph. 4:17–19). Like Saul of Tarsus, they are so convinced that their “religion” and “righteousness” are satisfactory that *in the name of that religion* they persecute God’s people!

***The world will not be honest about its own sin (vv. 22–24; 16:1–4).*** Once again, Jesus emphasized His words and His works. We have seen this emphasis throughout the Gospel of John (3:2; 5:36–38; 10:24–27; 14:10–11). The people had no excuse (“cloak”) for their sin. They had seen His works and heard His word, but they would not admit the truth. All of the evidence had been presented, but they were not honest enough to receive it and act on it.

This statement is parallel to what Jesus told the Pharisees after He had healed the blind man (John 9:39–41). They had to admit that Jesus had healed the man born blind, but they would not follow the evidence to its logical conclusion and put *their* trust in Him. Jesus told them that they were the ones who were blind! But since they admitted that they had seen a miracle, this made their sin even worse. They were not sinning in ignorance; they were sinning against a flood of light. Why? Because that light revealed their own sin and they did not want to face their sin honestly. Their attitude was similar to that described in 2 Peter 3:5—“For this they *willingly* are ignorant” (italics mine).

How does the Holy Spirit encourage believers when they are experiencing the hatred and opposition of the world? It is primarily through the Word of God. For one thing, the Spirit reminds us that this opposition is clearly expressed by various writers in the Scriptures. In John 15:25, Jesus quoted Psalms 35:19 and 69:4. The Word assured Him that the hatred of the world was not because of anything He had done to deliberately incite such opposition. We today can turn to passages like Philippians 1:28–30; 2 Timothy 2:9–12; Hebrews 12:3–4; and 1 Peter 4:12ff. We also have the encouraging words of our Lord found in the Gospels.

The Spirit also witnesses to us and through us during times of persecution (John 15:26–27). He reminds us that what we are experiencing is “the fellowship of His [Christ’s] sufferings” (Phil. 3:10) and that it is a privilege to bear reproach for His name. (Read *carefully* 1 Peter 4:12–19.) Times of persecution have always been for the church times of proclamation and witness. We must be “ready always to give an answer” when unsaved people attack us (1 Peter 3:15). The Spirit witnesses to us so that we can witness to the world (Mark 13:11). Apart from the power of the Spirit of God, we cannot give a clear witness for Christ (Acts 1:8).

There is no reason for the believer to stumble (“be offended,” John 16:1) when the world stokes up the furnace of persecution. He should expect persecution, if only because his Lord told him it was coming. (Note especially John 13:19 and 14:29 where the Lord warned His disciples in advance.) Furthermore, they must not stumble when this persecution comes from religious people who actually think they are serving God. The word translated “service” in John 16:2 means “priestly service.” This statement is certainly a description of Saul of Tarsus, who thought he was serving God by destroying the church (see Acts 7:57–8:3; 22:3–4; and 26:9–12).

It is tragic when “religious” people persecute and murder in the name of God. While it is true that “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church” (Tertullian), it is also true that their blood is the stain on the pages of history.

### **The Spirit as Reprover Witnesses through the Church (John 16:5–6)**

For three years, Jesus had been with them to protect them from attack; but now He was about to leave them. He had told them this earlier in the evening (John 13:33), and Peter had asked Him where He was going (John 13:36). However, Peter’s question revealed more concern about *himself* than about the Lord Jesus! Also, his question centered on the immediate, not the ultimate. It was necessary for Jesus to explain why it was important *for them* that He return to the Father.

**Blum, E. A. (1985). *John*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 326-328) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books**

### **G. The world’s hatred (15:18–16:4).**

15:18. Friendship with God results in enduring the world’s hatred. Conversely, being friends with the world is to be God’s enemy (James 4:4). Jesus alerted His disciples to the fact of the world’s hatred. **The world** in John’s Gospel is the system of organized society hostile to God, which is under Satan’s power (John 14:30). Believers might be surprised by this hostility (1 Peter

4:12–13), but they should remember that Jesus was **hated** from His birth (when Herod the Great sought to kill Him) to His death on the cross.

15:19. A fundamental reason for the world's hatred of a Christian lies in their differences (cf. 1 Peter 4:4; Rom. 12:2). A believer, having left the kingdom of darkness and having been transferred into the kingdom of God's Son (Col. 1:13), has a different joy, purpose, hope, and love. He now has certainty, truth, and a standard for life. Christians **have been chosen** (cf. John 15:16) **out of the world** system by Christ and they now belong to Him. Since they **do not belong to the world ... the world hates** them.

15:20–21. Jesus reminded His disciples of a statement He had made earlier: **No servant is greater than his master** (cf. 13:16). Previously He was referring to their need to imitate His humble service. But the principle has other applications. Christians are to identify so closely with Jesus that they share in His sufferings (**they will persecute you also**). On the positive side, some people followed and **obeyed Jesus' teaching**, so they **also** responded to the apostles' message. The root cause of the world's hatred against the disciples is their identification with Jesus. They hate Jesus because they are ignorant of God, **the One who sent Him**.

15:22–23. Jesus came as the Revelation of God. If Jesus **had not come**, their sin would not be so great. The statement, **they would not be guilty of sin** (cf. v. 24), must not be taken absolutely as 16:9 shows (cf. 3:19; 9:41). Before Jesus' coming people might have pleaded ignorance as an excuse for **sin** (cf. Acts 17:30). But now that the Light has come, those who willfully reject it **have no excuse**. The revelation in Jesus and by Jesus is so tied to the **Father** that to hate Jesus is to hate God (cf. John 15:24b).

15:24–25. These two verses amplify the thought in verses 22–23. Jesus' **miracles** were so distinctive that their import was unmistakable. The Jewish nation should have honestly confessed, "No one could perform the miraculous signs You are doing if God were not with Him" (3:2). But the nation as a whole rejected **both Jesus and the Father** because in their sins they loved darkness rather than light (3:19). The nation thought it was serving God in rejecting Jesus (16:2–3) but in reality it was serving Satan (8:44). Sin is basically irrational. Their hatred of Jesus was **without** any rational cause which also fits the pattern of hatred for righteous people, as seen in those who hated David (Pss. 35:19; 69:4; 109:3).

15:26–27. In the face of the opposition and hatred of the world a believer might be tempted to try to escape from the world or to be silent in it. Monasticism, extreme separation, and lack of witnessing have been too common in the church's history. Jesus encouraged His disciples by the promise of the Spirit's work in the world. As the work of Jesus was to promote the Father and not Himself, so the Spirit will witness to Jesus as the Messiah (**He will testify about Me**). And what He says is true for He is **the Spirit of Truth** (cf. 16:13). As **the Counselor** (cf. 14:26; 16:7), He presents God's truth to the world. The Spirit is sent **from the Father** (cf. 14:26), just as the Son was sent from the Father. Yet this mysterious work of the Spirit is not done in isolation from the church. The apostles were to bear witness to the facts that they came to know: **You also must testify**. As the apostles witnessed, the Holy Spirit persuaded, and people were saved. The same combination of human obedience to the divine command (Acts 1:8) coupled with the witness of the Spirit is needed in every generation.

16:1–2. The disciples may have wondered why Jesus was telling them about the world’s hatred and persecution. Jesus, anticipating this question, indicated that expecting trouble beforehand would help them remain in the path of God’s will. (He gave a second reason in v. 4.) The disciples would face excommunication and even death. Remembering that Jesus was ostracized and martyred and that He had predicted the same for His apostles would help fortify them. The earliest Christians were Jews (Acts 2:11, 14, 22), but quite soon after the church began to grow and spread, it was quickly thrust outside **the synagogue** (about a.d. 90). Persecution unto death occurred in the case of Stephen (Acts 7:59), James (Acts 12:2), and others (Acts 9:1–4). Some people throughout church history have been motivated to persecute believers because of a misguided zeal for God. They **think** they are **offering a service to God** (cf. Rom. 10:2).

16:3–4. The world will persecute Jesus’ followers **because they have not known the Father or Me**. They do not recognize the Father at work in the words and deeds of Jesus. The Jewish people, for example, had a certain knowledge of God through the Law, but that knowledge was not a saving knowledge for God said their “hearts go astray and they have not known My ways” (Ps. 95:8–10).

Jesus gave this warning to His disciples about coming persecution in order to strengthen their faith. By recognizing His knowledge of the future they would grow in their confidence in Him. Jesus **did not** give them **this** warning before because the world’s hatred was directed against Him. He shielded them with His personal presence, but now they would be His body on earth (Eph. 1:22–23).

#### **H. The Spirit’s work (16:5–6).**

16:5–6. Learning of Jesus’ departure brought depression to the disciples. They were obsessed by their coming personal loss of His immediate physical presence. If they could have understood why He was going and to whom He was going, then they would have rejoiced. Later (v. 22) Jesus predicted that their time of sorrow would be suddenly transformed into great joy. Jesus’ statement, **Now I am going to Him who sent Me**, should have led the disciples to ask questions, but they didn’t (Even Thomas [14:5] did not ask, **Where are You going?**) Their preoccupation with their own problems prevented their understanding the crucial nature of the time (“now”) and the momentous significance of the events (His death, burial, resurrection, and Ascension).

**White, J. E. (1998). *John*. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (p. 484). Broadman & Holman Publishers.**

#### **Planted in Christ (15:18–16:4)**

What is the result of a life that remains firmly planted in Christ? Here the suggestion is that you will be hated by the world (15:19). Christ was hated and rejected because of the conviction that pierced the heart of every person He encountered. Because of the life and teaching of Christ, individual persons know the truth and therefore have no excuse for those choices which deny God’s rule (15:24).

This conviction will not end with the life and ministry of Jesus, for the Counselor, or Holy Spirit, will continue to testify to the hearts and minds of persons through truth of Christ and the claims of Christ (15:26), as will the disciples (15:27). Why did Jesus share this with His disciples? “So that you will not go astray” (16:1). Jesus prepared His followers for the reality of the cross they too would bear because of His name.

**Work of the Spirit (16:5–6)**

Jesus chided His disciples for their concern over their own situation upon His departure rather than concern over where Jesus was going to be (16:5).

**The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). John 15:18-16:6. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.**

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