

31. The World Hates the Disciples

John 15:18-16:4

The Gospel According to John

Jesus and His disciples have enjoyed their last supper together, and the end of chapter fourteen tells us they all leave the upper room on their way to the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives (14:31). Judas had already left the group to betray Christ to the religious leaders. The Garden of Gethsemane was four or five hundred yards to the east of the Temple Mount, so it is likely that they stopped on the way to talk further as they passed the Temple. The Lord Jesus had a meeting with Judas and the soldiers still two or three hours ahead in the Garden of Gethsemane. He knew that He would soon be betrayed and arrested. It is in this context that Jesus bared His heart with His disciples to prepare them for the persecution that lay ahead for them. Even in Christ's darkest hour, i.e., His own dark night of the soul, His concern for those He loves overshadowed His thoughts concerning Himself. It tells us a lot about the Shepherd's care and love for His sheep.

The World Hates Disciples of Christ

¹⁸If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. ¹⁹If 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. ²⁰Remember what I told you: "A servant is not greater than his master." If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. ²¹They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me. ²²If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. ²³Whoever hates me hates my Father as well. ²⁴If I had not done among them the works no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. As it is, they have seen, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. ²⁵But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: "They hated me without reason" (John 15:18-25).

Jesus tells the disciples that the world will hate them (v. 18), to what is He referring to when He talks about the world? Why would the world hate the disciples?□

We are all in a battle, whether we want to acknowledge it or not. All of humanity is in the grip of unseen cosmic warfare between good and evil, Satan and God. Evil spirits are influencing what goes on in the world of flesh—and-blood individuals. Satan, the adversary and enemy of all true Christian believers, is trying to keep control of this world system he has set up against God. The Bible tells us that Satan is the god, prince, or ruler of this world:

Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out (John 12:31).

I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me (John 14:30).

There is a difference in the physical planet, which has been created by God, and the world that we are told not to love:

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them (1 John 2:15).

The natural world does not have a mind, so it cannot be evil and hate the disciples. The world that Jesus is talking about is the world system with its values and opposition to the Lord and His disciples. John goes further in his letter to elaborate on the values of "the world:" □

¹⁶For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever (1 John 2:16-17).

The world is comprised of human society's organizing itself apart from and without God, and all disciples of Christ are commissioned by the Lord Jesus to reach into this fallen world system and rescue precious people for whom Christ has died to redeem. For that reason, this world system with its unseen evil forces will always be in opposition to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. We, His witnesses, are to shine as light shines in the darkness. The world's institutions including our education systems, music, politics, workplaces, and yes, in some cases, even religion, are in opposition to God. If you doubt this, go into the higher echelons of the society in which you live and preach the Gospel of the Lord Jesus and see what happens! There will be opposition, and you will be persecuted for your faith. Paul the Apostle wrote to his protégé warning him of the same thing: **"In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted"** (2 Timothy 3:12).

The world system will always be opposed to people who have different values, goals, and aspirations to the way this world is set up. If you are to "go against the flow," then you will always experience conflict. What we are talking about here is more than just a resistance to a different way of thinking. The resistance that we are discussing here has a spiritual nature. It is the forces that are opposed to our Lord Jesus that you will encounter when you go against the flow of this world's system. You will be in opposition against unseen forces, principalities, and powers.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:12).

If you start to do things differently than the way of this world, do not be surprised if you are viewed with a watchful eye or criticized even by friends and family. If you are more overt about your faith, antagonism and persecution will surely come. Jesus warned His disciples that this would be the norm and that we are to expect it. He said these words not only for those listening to Him but also for us living now in the twenty-first century. □

Because we can expect persecution, I am not saying that we, as Christians, should shun or hide from the world. People in all walks of life and all social classes need to hear the good news of what Jesus has done, and we need to walk out the values and truth of God in whatever business, learning institution, or situation we exist. All Christians should follow the leading of the Holy

Spirit and not be a slave to fear what the world will say or do but seek to shine the light of Christ in whatever field of life God has put them. However, if we become entangled with the world and pursue its values, how will we stand out as being different? How will we attract others to the light of Christ if our light is dimmed through the entrapments of this world? People are looking for real life, and where it is evident, there will be a harvest resulting in people drawn to Christ, but this will not happen if we, as believers, are indistinguishable from the world. If this is your condition, ask God to ignite a fire within you for passion for Christ and seek to be free from the love of the world system. □

What major entrapments do you see in your society that are hard to avoid? What are they? Do you feel these things or activities are holding you back from being devoted to God? What does it mean to be “in the world but not of the world?” (John 17:15-16).

When we as believers carry the light of Jesus to others, we may run into opposition by people who are tools of the enemy. For example, my wife, Sandy, and I once went with a few other individuals from our church in England to a different town to share Christ with people we met on the streets. We met with resistance as we walked up to eight or nine of a motorcycle gang. We talked to them about the Lord Jesus. They were very antagonistic and verbally abusive. As we spoke with them, each one tried to outdo the others in bravado. One of the men, Frank, seemed to outperform the others. He became bitterly critical of us in his opposition. Thinking we were making them angry, we left to join up with the rest of our group in the house from which we set out.

About two hours later, the same man who was critical of us walked through the door with others of our team. He was shaking under the power and conviction of the Holy Spirit on him. Of course, our team received him well. We were amazed at the change in the man; he was now so open and humble and started to share details of his life. He decided to follow Christ that night. Although Frank was the most argumentative, it was because he was being challenged and drawn to the Father. We were witnessing an inner struggle. If people react to the Gospel or your testimony, it could be that they are responding to the conviction of the Holy Spirit working in their hearts.

If you pursue what the Lord is doing and back it up with prayer, you might see that person come through to faith in Christ. Do not give up on such people, but continue to persevere in prayer and show them the love of God. If you are a disciple and seek to represent Jesus, you should not be surprised if you get a response of disdain and anger. Remember that you are not alone. The Lord is with you and working in the heart of the one with whom you are sharing Christ.

Living around you, perhaps even working with you, are those who are directed and ruled by a different spirit than the One who lives with you:

¹As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient (Ephesians 2:1-2. Emphasis mine).

People have all types of responses, but we cannot know what God is doing in their hearts. The Lord, however, does see their heart and will testify to His Word by the Holy Spirit. There will always be those who respond to God's gracious invitation as well as those who refuse. Where the truth of God's Word is shining, there will be spiritual warfare and, sometimes, persecution.

Why Does God Allow Believers to go Through Persecution?

There is a deeper trust in God that comes to us when we go through persecution for our faith. As far as we know, Paul the Apostle suffered more for his faith than any other in the early days of the church, but he came to a place in his life where he understood that the power of Christ rested upon him significantly when he was at his weakest and most vulnerable:□

⁹But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. ¹⁰That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

When we are weak in ourselves, God grants His power to rest on us and use our words powerfully. When Paul the Apostle came to Corinth in Greece, there was opposition from religious folk who were abusive to him (Acts 18:5-6), but what do we see as a result? The Lord was calling forth people He had foreordained to life through his words and drawing many to the Gospel:

⁹And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, ¹⁰for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people." ¹¹And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them (Acts 18:9-11).

Wouldn't it be easier if God would just show us all who are foreordained to eternal life? The invitation of the Gospel goes out to everyone, but we are not able to see the hidden work that God is doing in people's hearts. We don't know what God will do if we are simply obedient to share the Gospel with those around us. God can bring great fruit from our lives if we trust Him, even in persecution. Let's now continue in our text:□

Servants are Not Greater than the Master

²⁰Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. ²¹They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me (John 15:20-21).

How do you see Christians being persecuted today, and when a believer has opposition from others around them, who is the protagonist, and how should a believer respond?

We are not to hide away from this world, but we are to confront and bring a different spirit onto the battleground. When Jesus had opposition from individuals, He did not reply with a competitive critical spirit. His spiritual warfare was to respond to anger with a soft answer: “**A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger**” (Proverbs 15:1). True spiritual warfare does the opposite of what the enemy is seeking to do. People are never your enemy. People are influenced by the “spirit of this world,” which has always been in opposition to our Lord. We do not fight with words or fists, but with prayer: □

For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds (2 Corinthians 10:4).

The evil spirit on individuals is stronger on some more than others. The more people give themselves to the spirit of this world, the more they are governed and controlled by that same spirit. When the evil spirit of this world is leading and influencing people, they can recognize if the name of the Lord is on you. Remember that you have been bought with a price and that you are not your own (1 Corinthians 6:20). When you gave your life to the Lord, the Spirit of God stamped a seal of ownership on you (Ephesians 4:30). Because of that Seal of God on you, those with an opposite spirit will react to the Spirit’s anointing and authority. When the unbelieving seven sons of Sceva tried to cast out an evil spirit in the same manner that Paul the Apostle did, the evil spirit did not see the Spirit of Christ on them. It was a big mistake for the seven sons:

¹³Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, “In the name of the Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.” ¹⁴Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. ¹⁵One day the evil spirit answered them, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you?” ¹⁶Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding (Acts 19:13-16 Emphasis mine).

We should not feel nervous as we read such passages because these men tried to execute God’s authority without the Spirit resting upon them. The men did not have the stamp or seal of God’s ownership on them, but if you are a believer, you do, and evil spirits can see the Spirit of God on you, and they must bow before the Lord. We are to be confident that we are not alone and that the Spirit of our God rests upon us.

The Helper (Advocate) Will Be with Us

As the Lord Jesus looked around at the eleven that night, He reminded them that the Spirit’s coming would help them endure persecution and the opposition that He knew would come.

²⁶When the Advocate 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. ²⁷And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning (John 15:26-27).

The eleven disciples were to wait for the Holy Spirit to come; He would be their Helper, their *Paraclete*, the one called alongside to help them. The coming of the Spirit on the Day of

Pentecost would counteract the spiritual battle that would be waged against them by the spirit of the world. I'm sure the disciples did not like the way the conversation was going, but the Lord knew all things, and they had come to trust Him and His words. Before the persecution started against them, He warned them it would happen. They would be put out of the synagogues, and anyone who killed them would think that he was doing God a service:

¹All this I have told you so that you will not fall away. ²They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. ³They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. ⁴I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you about them. I did not tell you this from the beginning because I was with you (John 16:1-4).

To be put out of the synagogue was a disaster for a Jewish person in the time of Jesus. Friendship and community life revolved around the synagogue. Saul, who became the apostle Paul, was influenced by a similar deception. A religious spirit had deceived him into attacking the true church of God. He wrote, "For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it" (Galatians 1:13). I'm sure that it was the church who prayed for him, and the Lord opened his eyes to the reality that he was one of those who thought that he was offering a service to God by persecuting believers in Christ (v. 2).

This same kind of persecution by religious men is going on all over the world in this twenty-first century. Jesus warned the disciples and those believers to come that they would be put out of their synagogues, mosques, temples, and communities for the sake of Christ, and we should expect it. We are not to sugarcoat the Gospel to those we lead to the Lord. There may be difficult times ahead for those of us who are in Christ Jesus. The Bible tells us there is a time ahead in the end times where many will fall away from the faith because of intense persecution.

⁹Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. ¹⁰At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other (Matthew 24:9-10).

Just as the early disciples were empowered by the Spirit's coming in power, I believe that true believers will endure persecution and that great power will be given them in those days. The enemy will try to throw everything at the church in the last days. More than any time in the history of the world, more Christians have been killed for their faith than in all the previous centuries combined. Our brothers and sisters are suffering persecution in countries, such as China, Russia, Romania, Albania, Cuba, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Indonesia, Sudan, India, Syria, Egypt, and the list goes on and on.

In 1563, John Foxe began a memorial of those who lost their lives for bearing witness to the Gospel, starting with Stephen and ending with the most recent martyrs of his day, i.e., those killed during Bloody Mary's reign. *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* has recently been updated to include those who have suffered for Christ in recent years. Here is one of many stories from China and dates from 1969:

An eyewitness report was received about the death of several Christians in a Communist labor camp. A young girl was bound hand and foot and made to kneel in the center of a circle of people who were commanded to stone her or be shot. Several people in the village refused to take up stones and were immediately shot. The girl died under a hail of rocks- her face shining like that said of St. Stephen when he was persecuted and stoned (Acts 6:15). Later, one of those who threw the stones broke down and received Christ as Savior.¹

Have you ever experienced scorn or hostility because of your faith in Christ? Share what happened.

God has not left us alone. Just as the Lord told the disciples that they were to be those who stand bravely for the Lord, so we also are to speak against the evil in our day. □

The *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* also has the story told by Bishop Theodoret of Cyrrihus, Syria, about a man named Telemachus, who lived in or about 400 AD. He grew up as a non-religious man and gave himself to worldly pleasures. He spent many years trying to find meaning to his life until he was told that the Lord Jesus had died on the cross to deliver him from his sin. Becoming a Christian, he had a remarkable turnaround in his life. He entered a monastery and became a monk, and in the year 402 AD, while in prayer, the young monk felt the Lord speaking to him to leave the monastery and to share with others the same message that changed his life. The Lord was very specific as to where to go. It was many miles westward to Rome. Not sure as to why he should travel to Rome, he went on the long trek being obedient to the call. □

When he got to Rome, he got caught up in the crowd; hundreds of people were excitedly going somewhere. He wasn't sure where they were going, but his curiosity got the better of him as he was swept up in the crowd and found himself inside the Roman Coliseum. The Romans had just defeated the Goths, and a big victory celebration was going on in honor of the emperor. In front of the emperor's box stood the gladiators. "We, who are about to die, salute you," they cried out in unison. Instantly, Telemachus recalled being told about the gladiator games, but the monk had thought that it was just a legend. Now he found out that it was true. □

As the gladiators began to fight, arms were hacked off, and blood was everywhere, with the crowd crying out for more. Men were dying in front of Telemachus as the crowd got into ecstasy at the senseless brutality. Not only was he sickened by what he saw in the arena but also by what he saw among the spectators. In that instant, he realized that it must stop. From his seat, he yelled out to the gladiators: "IN THE NAME OF JESUS, STOP!" But no one heard above the frenzy of the crowd.

Almost without thinking, he jumped over the wall into the battle arena of the fighters. The gladiators were surprised at this unexpected intrusion and momentarily stopped fighting as

¹ *The New Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, updated 2001 by Harold J. Chadwick. Published by Bridge-Logos Publishers, Gainesville FL. Pg. 329.

Telemachus shouted again at the top of his voice, “IN THE NAME OF JESUS, STOP!” The crowd of spectators thought that this was all part of the fight and began laughing at what they thought was a clown amid the blood and gore. One of the gladiators took a swing at Telemachus with his sword, just barely missing him. With that, the other gladiators came toward him with their swords. Telemachus shouted out again and again at the top of his voice, "IN THE NAME OF JESUS, STOP!”

The crowd stopped laughing as they heard what he was commanding in the name of the Lord. He began to dodge the gladiator's swords, shouting with each passing moment, "For the love of Christ, Stop!" "In the name of Jesus, Stop!" When the dust settled, there lay Telemachus on the ground with a sword in his chest. There was utter silence in the crowd. At that moment it was said that his words still echoed in the Coliseum, "In the name of Christ, Stop." After what seemed like an eternity, one man after another got up from his seat and left in complete silence and disbelief. □

The sight of the dead monk in the center of the Coliseum and the reaction of the crowd also led the emperor and his guests silently to stand, to turn, and to leave the Coliseum. After a few minutes, the Gladiators put their swords down, and they too departed. All that remained in that giant Coliseum was the thin, lifeless body of the young monk. History claims that this was the very last gladiator game at the Coliseum. The memory of that man screaming to the crowd and the image of the bloodthirsty lust of the crowd changed the hearts and minds of the Romans. Within the hour the emperor issued an edict forbidding any future games of war within the Roman Empire. □

There were no more gladiator matches in Rome and no more killing as sport. This was all because one man stood up and said, “In the Name of Jesus, Stop!” Jesus came to go against the flow of this world, to take a stand against the spirit at work in this world, and to deliver everyone who will respond to His message of love. Brothers and sisters in Christ, the spirit of this world would have us compromise instead of standing our ground against evil, and shouting along with Telemachus, “In the Name of Jesus, Stop!”

We too might be killed for our faith, but this world is not all there is. There is an eternity to enjoy with our Lord on the other side of the veil of death. We need to look at the ways of this world and take our stand to the things that cause injustice, pain, bitterness, anger, and murder. In the name of Jesus, Stop! When we see the oppression of our neighbors, the greed of our leaders, and the system failing those who need help the most, we need to stand up and say, “IN THE NAME OF JESUS, STOP.”

Prayer: Father, we do pray for all those suffering for the name of Christ in the days in which we live. Deliver them and us from evil. Our prayer, Father, is for grace to help them amid weakness. May Your power and glory rest upon Your suffering church, in Jesus' name! Amen □

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