

## Chapter 31: The Enemies of Jesus

*John 15:18–16:4a*

The point of Jesus' allegory of the vine in John 15:1–17 is that Jesus will produce the fruit of love in his people. Nevertheless, that doesn't mean that his people will experience love from all sides. While those in the household of God must seek to love one another, the reaction of the world to Christians will *not* be one of love. Quite the opposite, for the world will *hate* Christians precisely because Christians resemble Jesus. Jesus, though, will not leave his disciples to fend for themselves. In John 15:18–16:4a, Jesus prepares his disciples for the hatred that they will face so that they will not be surprised by the violent reaction of the world—and so that they will not give up when the hatred of the world rages at its strongest. Beyond simply telling his disciples about what dangers they face, Jesus also tells more about the help that he will give them after his departure. Here we learn that *Jesus sends his Spirit to keep us from falling away*.

### The World's Hatred (John 15:18–25)

In John 15:18, Jesus transitions abruptly from the love that his disciples must bear for one another to the hatred that the world will have against them. Their community of love will stand “over against the world” who hates them.<sup>1</sup> Jesus says: “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you” (John 15:18). The condition statement “If the world hates you” is not a hypothetical possibility that *could* happen, but a reality that *will* happen.<sup>2</sup> Just as the world has hated Jesus—indeed, just as the world is right at that moment preparing to arrest and crucify Jesus—so also the world will hate the disciples of Jesus.

Some translations of John 15:18, then, translate the imperative phrase “*know* that it has hated me before it hated you” (ESV) as an indicative: “*you know* that it has hated me...” (KJV, NASB). The form of this word could go either way, but the context forces us to interpret this verse as an imperative. R. C. H. Lenski explains, “Jesus bids the disciples to keep in mind and to consider how the world treated him. This will make it seem less strange to them when they find themselves treated in the same way.”<sup>3</sup> It is as though Jesus is grabbing his disciples by the shoulders and shaking them to force them to deal with the serious things he is telling them. To prepare his disciples for the hatred that they will encounter, Jesus wants the disciples to “keep in mind” (NIV 2011) or to “be aware” (NET) that the hatred of the world will be an ongoing reality. John Calvin writes that “the Gospel cannot be published without instantly driving the world to rage. Consequently, it will never be possible for godly teachers to avoid the hatred of the world.”<sup>4</sup> Just as Jesus Christ, the true vine (John 15:1), inflamed the world to crucify him in short order, so also we, the branches bearing Jesus' fruit (John 15:5), will also provoke the world's wrath.

## Not of This World

Jesus continues: “If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (John 15:19). The reason that the world hates us is that we are not *of* the world. That is, our character is not “derived...from the world,” so that we are not “inwardly one with it.”<sup>5</sup> We are branches united with the true vine, so we begin to produce fruit that the world cannot on its own. Therefore, the world hates our gospel fruitfulness that contrasts so vividly with its own fruitlessness. While the world claims to love cardinal Christian values like peace, love, and wisdom, the world finds God’s peace, God’s love, and God’s wisdom to be foolishness. Therefore, “the world hates nothing in believers but what is of God.”<sup>6</sup>

Jesus also notes here that his disciples formerly *were* part of the world: “because you are not of the world, *but I chose you out of the world*, therefore the world hates you” (John 15:19). Jesus spoke about his election of the disciples only a few verses earlier, toward the end of the allegory of the vine: “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you” (John 15:16). The disciples did not choose Jesus because they were formerly part of the world. But, because Jesus chose them out of the world in order to bear abiding fruit, they are no longer conformed to the world, and the world will therefore hate them. D. A. Carson writes, “Former rebels who have by the grace of the king been won back to loving allegiance to their rightful monarch are not likely to prove popular with those who persist in rebellion.”<sup>7</sup>

## A Servant is Not Greater than his Master

Jesus then reminds his disciples that they are only walking in the same trail that Jesus himself blazed: “Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours” (John 15:20). The disciples have seen the way that the world has hated and rejected their master, so why should they expect to be treated any differently? This does not mean that the mistreatment of Jesus was *good*, but only that mistreatment will be our *normal* experience in the world. There is an element of comfort in this verse. To the degree that the world hates us for bearing Jesus’ fruit, we see in their hatred that we are indeed succeeding at bearing fruit. Never before in the history of the world have God’s people borne good fruit, so to be hated and rejected like Jesus means that God’s gracious work of sanctification is at work in us. Through persecution, we find confirmation that we are servants who resemble our master!<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, Jesus ties the world’s rejection of us to his *word* that dwells in us: “If they kept my word, they will also keep yours” (John 15:20). Clearly, Jesus does not mean that the world has “kept” his word obediently, but that they have stumbled over his word. In the same way, the world will also stumblingly “keep” our word as well. That is, they will misunderstand our word, reject our word, and condemn us on account of our word.<sup>9</sup> This is not because our word is important on its own, but because Jesus’ words abide in us (John 15:7) to shape our word. As servants, we resemble our master when his word abides in us and causes us to echo that word. The world rejected the word who became flesh (John 1:11, 14), and the world will reject that word when they hear it from us.

## Rejecting the Sender

Ultimately, then, the world rejects us because the world continues to reject Jesus. But Jesus takes this logic one step further by explaining that the world rejects *him* because the world rejects his Father:

“But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father also.” (John 15:21–23)

So, Jesus says that the world will mistreat the disciples “on account of my name”—that is, the world rejects the disciples, because the world rejects Jesus. But then, the world rejects Jesus because the world rejects “him who sent me”—the Father.

Jesus has already stated several times that the reason the world rejects him is that the world does not know his Father. For example, Jesus says, “And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent” (John 5:37–38). Later on, Jesus explains that they do not know the Father because they are of a different father: “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil...” (John 8:42–44). In these earlier statements, Jesus spoke both to defend himself and to rebuke the unbelieving world. Now, Jesus makes this same point to comfort his disciples as they prepare to go out in a hostile world. The fact that the world hates them is proof that the world does not know God the Father in the way that the disciples do, as revealed through Jesus Christ, the Son of God whom the Father sent.

The testimony of Jesus, though, removes any excuse that the world has for sin: “If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin” (John 15:22). Certainly, this does not mean that if Jesus never came into the world, the world would be without sin.<sup>10</sup> Instead, Jesus means that the world’s sin is compounded and confirmed. No one can claim the excuse of not having known the truth about the Father, since Jesus has come into the world and proclaimed the truth of the Father to them. Instead of receiving that testimony, the world rejected Jesus—and therefore rejected the Father—altogether. Jesus “performed the duty of a good and faithful Teacher, but without success, because their [the world’s] malice would not suffer them to acquire soundness of mind.”<sup>11</sup> After repeatedly pleading with them to believe in him, the world nevertheless rejects Jesus.

Jesus then crystallizes the implications of rejecting him: “Whoever hates me hates my Father also” (John 15:23). The world will hate the disciples “on account of my name” (John 15:21)—that is, on account of their hatred for Jesus—but also on account of their hatred for the Father too. As Lenski observes, “The world’s hatred flows from the combined rejection of Jesus and of the Father.”<sup>12</sup> Jesus is the one who reveals the Father to the world (John 14:6–7, 9–10), so to hate Jesus does not leave the option of choosing the Father instead of Jesus. Whoever hates Jesus necessarily hates the Father as well.

## The Works and the Word

As the final, conclusive piece of evidence against the wickedness of the world, Jesus reminds the disciples of the works that he performed in the sight of the world: “If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father” (John 15:24). By the signs that Jesus performed, he proved more that he was more than simply a magician or a wonder-worker. Furthermore, Jesus proved that he was greater than Moses or the Prophets. John Calvin explains that “Christ is more eminent [than Moses and the Prophets] in miracles in this respect, that he was not merely a minister, like the rest, but was strictly the Author of them; for he employed his own name, his own authority, and his own power, in performing miracles.”<sup>13</sup> Through his signs, Jesus demonstrated that he is nothing less than the Son of God who has come in the flesh for the salvation of the world.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, the world saw his glory in the signs that he performed, but persisted in their hardness of heart and unbelief (John 12:36–43). The rejection of the world was not a surprise, but the fulfillment of Scripture: “But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: ‘They hated me without a cause.’” (John 15:21–25). The works Jesus performed would not be effective in changing hearts, just as the word of God had prophesied so many years before. Jesus came to be rejected by his people, and his disciples must understand that they too will face the same kind of rejection. The world will continue to hate Jesus because the world hates the Father, and the disciples will receive the brunt of that hatred.

### Bearing Witness in a Hostile World (John 15:26–27)

The transition after the allegory of the vine into this discussion of the hatred of the world was abrupt, and the transition into the next two verses is equally abrupt: “But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning” (John 15:26–27). Here, Jesus resumes his teaching about the new Paraclete (“Helper”), the Holy Spirit, about whom he began speaking in John 14:15–26. In these two short verses, Jesus reveals a significant amount about the person and work of the Holy Spirit, as well as the function of the church whom the Holy Spirit will empower.

#### “Whom I Will Send”

To begin, notice that Jesus himself will send the Holy Spirit to his disciples: “But when the Helper comes, whom *I* will send to you from the Father....” Earlier, Jesus said that he will ask the Father, and the Father “will give you another Helper, to be with you forever” (John 14:15). Then, Jesus stated that “the Father will send [the Holy Spirit] in my name” (John 14:26). While introducing the person of the Holy Spirit, Jesus explained that the Father will send the Holy Spirit. Now, Jesus insists that *he* will send the Holy Spirit from the Father. As we discussed in our chapter on John 14:15–31, this all seems fairly circular: “The Father’s giving is accomplished by the Son’s sending; the Son’s sending is accomplished by the Father’s giving.”<sup>15</sup>

The reason for this circular reasoning and explanation has to do with the union of work by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The persons of the Trinity do not function as a committee of three

gods, with each person carrying out his own assignment unilaterally, apart from the other two. Not at all—the Trinity is the union of three persons who exist as one God. Therefore, one of the basic principles of explaining the work of the Trinity is expressed through the Latin phrase, *Opera trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*. In English, this means that the external works of the Trinity are indivisible. We cannot separate the work of the Father from the Son and the Holy Spirit, nor the work of the Son from the Father and the Holy Spirit, nor (as in this case) the work of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son. The Father gives the Spirit according to the request of the Son, and the Son sends the Holy Spirit from the Father. The coming of the Spirit into the world is the unique role of the Holy Spirit, but the Father and the Son are intimately involved in giving, requesting, and sending the Spirit.

Additionally, this passage is important to defend the critical doctrine of the equality of the persons in the Trinity. If we only had John 14, where Jesus says that he will “ask” the Father, but that the Father will “give” and “send” the Holy Spirit, we might imagine that the Son does not have the authority to send the Holy Spirit. Here in John 15, we see that the Son of God has full authority to send the Spirit of God, although he never does this work unilaterally, but only with his Father. In the same way, we should notice that Jesus’ descriptions in John 14 tell us that the Father will not give or send the Holy Spirit unilaterally, but only at the request of the Son. The Father and the Son are equals who work together to send the Holy Spirit in the world to apply the work of redemption that Jesus is about to accomplish at the cross.

#### “Who Proceeds from the Father”

But what about the Holy Spirit? Is the Spirit equal with the Father and the Son, or does the Spirit exist on a lower plane of divinity than the other two persons of the Trinity? Orthodox Christian theologians have always used this word “proceeds” to describe the relationship between the Spirit and the Father and the Son. Just as Father *begets* the Son, and the Son *is begotten* of the Father, so the Holy Spirit *proceeds* from the Father and the Son.<sup>16</sup> So, we speak of the *eternal generation* of the Son to describe the truth that there was never a time when the Father existed apart from his Son, but that the Son is eternally begotten from the Father. In the same way, we speak of the *eternal procession* of the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Spirit’s eternal procession first protects the truth that there was never a time when the Holy Spirit did not proceed from the Father and the Son, so that the Holy Spirit is not a creature whom the Father and the Son created later. No, the Holy Spirit is fully God, and therefore just as eternal as the Father and the Son. Lenski helpfully argues against any suggestion of inequality of subordination among the persons of the Trinity this way:

Against this procedure stands every Scripture passage which places the Persons on an equality. Where equals are a unit in a purpose and a work, the equality remains undisturbed when one of these equals requests another, sends another, allows himself to be sent by another, to perform one or the other great part of that work. All these acts reveal only the perfect harmony of these equals in carrying out their one work, each acting with the other, each with the other’s consent.<sup>17</sup>

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are each fully God; nevertheless, we do not worship three gods, but one God who exists as three persons.

But additionally, the word *procession* helps us to differentiate between the relationship of the Son to the Father and the Holy Spirit to the Father and the Son. The Spirit is not another Son, for the Holy Spirit is not begotten of the Father. Instead, the Spirit *proceeds* from the Father and the Son. Admittedly, we cannot really pin down the exact meaning, nor the difference between, the words *generation/begotten* and *proceed/procession*. These are biblical words that teach us truth, but only in limited capacity. Our minds cannot extrapolate the fullness of the mysteries within the Godhead that these words reveal. The problem, then, is not with the words themselves, but in our own limited capacities to comprehend what the words communicate. Once again, Lenski is worth quoting on this matter:

As the ray is like the sun, the stream like the source, so the Spirit is of the same essence with the Father because he proceeds from him. The fact that this procession is not from the Father alone but, when fully revealed, also from the Son, we see from Rom. 8:9; Phil. 1:19; II Cor. 3:17; Gal. 4:6; Rev. 22:1; etc., where the Spirit is in various ways called the Spirit of Christ.<sup>18</sup>

This is a great mystery that our minds cannot fully unravel. Therefore, the unity and diversity of our triune God is worthy of our wonder and our worship.

### The Spirit of Truth who Bears Witness

Additionally, Jesus calls the Holy Spirit “the Spirit of truth” which we almost certainly must read alongside Jesus’ further explanation at the end of the verse: “he will bear witness about me” (John 15:26). In the midst of the opposition of the world and the persecution of the church, Jesus will send the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father to bear witness about Jesus.<sup>19</sup> By the truth of the Holy Spirit, we will neither fall away from Jesus, nor go astray from his truth. The Helper will keep us on the right track by reminding us of the words of Jesus (John 14:26) and by bearing witness to the person of Jesus in our Lord’s absence (John 15:26).

This is probably the connection in which the legal nature of the word “Helper” or “Counsellor” comes out most clearly: “The Spirit, so to speak, conducts Christ’s case for him before the world.”<sup>20</sup> While the world will bring forth witness after witness in an attempt to discredit Jesus in the court of human history and public opinion, the Holy Spirit will patiently, steadfastly, and resolutely bear witness to Jesus as the Word who became flesh for us and for our salvation. In this way, the Holy Spirit will strengthen Jesus’ people in their faith in the midst of their sufferings.

### “You Also Will Bear Witness”

Still, the disciples have their own role to bear witness with the Holy Spirit: “And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning” (John 15:27). When Jesus departs from the world, the disciples will remain to bear faithful witness to the words and works of Jesus while he was here. While this applies to some degree to all Jesus’ disciples up to the present day (including us), Jesus is speaking uniquely to these first disciples who were “with me from the beginning.” That is, they are the eyewitnesses who relate to us what they have seen and heard directly from Jesus in their preaching and in the Scriptures that they wrote.<sup>21</sup>

This explains a bit more about how the world will hate the disciples on account of the name of Jesus (John 15:21). The disciples will do nothing other than to bear witness Jesus *himself*. Just as the

actual, bodily presence of Jesus provoked the world to violence against our Lord, so also the ongoing testimony of Jesus will provoke the world's hatred against our Lord's disciples.<sup>22</sup> The first disciples bore witness because they were with Jesus from the beginning, testifying to everything they had seen and heard. All subsequent generations of disciples continue to bear witness as we preach from the record of that witness written down in the Scriptures. Therefore, the witness of the Holy Spirit and the witness of the church through the proclamation of the word about Jesus is united as one testimony with the Spirit of Jesus, who bears witness to confirm the truthfulness of that word.<sup>23</sup>

### **Protection from Apostasy (John 16:1–4a)**

Given the hatred of the world (John 15:18–25), the risks for faithfully bearing witness to Jesus will be high (John 15:26–27). Therefore, the “greatest danger the disciples will confront from the opposition of the world is not death but apostasy.”<sup>24</sup> Jesus warns his disciples of the perils they face: “I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away” (John 16:1). Literally, the phrase translated here as “falling away” describes a spring-loaded, baited trap that will clamp shut when someone reaches for the bait.<sup>25</sup> Jesus knows that the disciples will be tempted in a variety of ways that could entrap them, keeping them from effective, fruitful ministry, and he prepares them for the dangers that they will face.<sup>26</sup> Both the fruit that they will bear and the testimony they will give will arise from the ministry and power of the Holy Spirit working in them, for the “work of the Holy Spirit in the church is done in the context of persecution.”<sup>27</sup> The path of discipleship is not covered with plush, red carpet, but with snares, liars, robbers, and murderers.

#### Dangers from the World

Jesus names excommunication and martyrdom as two specific dangers his disciples will face: “They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me” (John 16:2–3). To be excommunicated (“put out of the synagogues”) meant more than religious persecution, but would mean being entirely ostracized from society.<sup>28</sup> This pressure would bring the most excruciating pain, pitting families, friends, and neighbors against each other, all for the sake of Jesus' name.

Beyond social pressure, Jesus says that his disciples will face death for the faithful witness they will bear for Jesus. Jesus' followers will not only face occasional crimes of passion perpetrated against them, but they will be systematically hunted down for their faith, for those of the world will believe that they are offering worship to God by murdering Jesus' disciples. Dark days are ahead for any who would follow Jesus as his disciple.

#### The Coming Hour

Still, Jesus does not leave his disciples to anxiety and despair. He closes this section by saying, “But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you” (John 16:4a). Jesus wants his disciples to be fully prepared for the hatred of the world that he himself had to endure (John 15:18). But we should also notice that Jesus describes these events as a coming “hour,” since the word “hour” has special significance in the Gospel of John. D. A. Carson writes:

Indeed, because *hour* is so regularly tied up with Jesus' appointment with his death/exaltation (*cf.* notes on 2:4), it is hard not to see that the Evangelist has introduced another irony: what appears to be *their* hour has been introduced by *Jesus'* hour, but in his case, he seems to be suffering defeat in the very moment when he is winning the greatest of all victories, while at their hour they seem to be winning when they are suffering the greatest of all defeats.<sup>29</sup>

Just as Jesus' hour of going to the cross must come in a very short amount of time, so the hour for the sufferings and persecution of the church must come as well. Even so, the Holy Spirit will continue to bear witness in the midst of the disciples to strengthen and encourage them for the struggle ahead.

## Discussion Questions

1. Why does the world hate Christians? Does it help for Jesus to explain the hatred of the world as he does in this passage? How does this prepare us for the hatred coming toward us?
2. Why does the Holy Spirit need to bear witness about Jesus? How important does this work of bearing witness to Jesus seem to us? How does the sending of the Holy Spirit keep us from falling away from Jesus? What hope would we have if Jesus finished his work of redemption (living, dying, rising again, and ascending to the Father), gave us the Scriptures, but did *not* send his Holy Spirit?
3. How does the Spirit's work of bearing witness relate to the work of the first disciples to bear witness? How does the work of the first disciples to bear witness relate to *our* work of bearing witness? What does it mean for us to bear witness to Jesus today?
4. What could faithfulness cost you? How do you prepare for the possible cost? What does Jesus give you to prevent you from falling away? What confidence do you have that the powers of this age have no ultimate power over you?

## Notes

1. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 524.
2. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 310.
3. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 1054.
4. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 123. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.v.iv.html>>
5. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 1055.
6. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 124. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.v.iv.html>>
7. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 525.
8. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 1059.
9. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 1058.



10. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 526.
11. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 126. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.v.v.html>>
12. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 1062.
13. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 128–29. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.v.v.html>>
14. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 525.
15. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 1067.
16. It is a well-known matter of church history that the Western Church (Roman Catholic and Protestant) confesses that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, while the Eastern Orthodox Church confesses that the Holy Spirit proceeds only from the Father. This matter is beyond the scope of what we can discuss here, except that we should note the critical role that the Son plays in asking for and sending the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit is often spoken of in Scripture as the “Spirit of Christ/Jesus/the Son” (Rom. 8:9; Gal. 4:6; Phil. 1:19; 1 Pet. 1:11). The weight of the evidence in Scripture points to the idea that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and* the Son, albeit in different ways. For the classic defense of the double procession of the Holy Spirit in the Western Church, see Anselm of Canterbury’s “On the Procession of the Holy Spirit.”
17. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 1068.
18. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 1070.
19. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 130–31. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.v.v.html>>
20. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 607.
21. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 131–32. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.v.v.html>>
22. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 2, 1022–23.
23. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 1072.
24. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 530.
25. “And this he has done “in order that you may not be entrapped.” The figure in σκανδαλίζω is that of a trap in which a crooked stick (σκάδαλον) holds the bait and springs the trap when touched. The figure is not that of a stumblingblock over which one trips, although many so translate.” (Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 1073.)
26. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 132–33. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.vi.i.html>>
27. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 614.
28. Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 528–29.
29. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 532.