

To Keep You (John 15:26–16:4)
By Pastor Jeff Alexander (7/17/2022)

Introduction

The focus of this portion of Christ's final instructions was to reveal that the disciples and all who follow Christ from that point on until Christ's return would be subject to persecution because of their relationship to Jesus. The reason for the world's hatred of Christ and His own is that they live contrary to the world. The world loves conformity but will not tolerate those who are instructed not to be conformed to the world (Romans 12:2).

Satan is the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4), the prince of the power of the air, the one who energizes the children of disobedience (Ephesians 2:2). He is a liar and deceiver (John 8:44), and the whole world lies under the power of his corruptive spells (1 John 5:19). Thus, the Spirit of truth will make it possible for Christ's own to navigate the snares and pitfalls that have taken all others captive to do Satan's will (2 Timothy 2:26).

To counter Satan's plan, the Father would send the Holy Spirit, the "Helper," in Christ's name. The "Helper" was introduced earlier in the upper room discourse (14:16, 26). Jesus brought Him into this section in verse 26, where He is called the "Spirit of truth," who proceeds from the Father (Acts 2:33).

I. The World and the Jews

1. John 15:18–25 deals with the *cause* of the persecution the disciples would expect from the world. You are not of the world because Jesus chose you out of the world (v. 19). He wanted them to remember this information ("the word," v. 20). So, who or what was the *world* Jesus was warning about?
 - a. *World*, as generally used in Scripture, refers to the temporal realm—the created order (earth)—as distinguished from the unseen spiritual realm. However, the Greek word translated *world* (*cosmos*) describes an apt and harmonious arrangement or constitution, order, or government of the inhabitants of the earth (James 4:4; 1 John 2:15–17)
 - b. Perhaps others hope to preserve themselves from the hatred of the world by a little compromise. Again, Jesus does not allow for such a position. He chose His own *out* of the world, transforming them through the new birth. Thus, the world does not *know* them because it did not know their Savior. In the meantime, true believers are servants of Christ (v. 20) and live by faith to faithfully serve Him as they wait for His revealing (1 John 4:4; 5:4, 5).
 - c. Note *how* the disciples were told to distinguish between those of the world and those who belong to Christ (v. 20). You must never think it is about you if you are a servant acting in His name, for they do not know Him who sent Jesus (v. 21).
2. It is important to understand who "*they*" were that Jesus references. Although *they* were clearly identified with the world, *they* were the *Jews*.
 - a. The Jews rejected Christ's teaching, even when His Word was backed up by His works, works that no one else had ever done or could do (v. 24). However, it was His *words* the Jews hated because by them He exposed their false religion (v. 22; John 3:19, 20).
 - b. Why did they reject God's revelation to them? What was the root of their evil? It was their rebellion against the true God of their fathers. In that rebellion, they invented a god of their own devising, served by a religion of human *tradition*, making void the Word of God (Matthew 15:6). Although they professed that God was their Father (John 8:41, 42), their true father was actually the devil because their will was to do his will (8:44).

c. That *they* were the *Jews* is seen in Jesus' reference to their *law*. Their *law* was the Old Testament Scriptures (v. 25), as seen in His citing the psalms (either 35:19 or 69:4), "*They hated me without a cause* [a legitimate and lawful reason]" (15:25). The point here is to show that, while the Jews supposedly accepted the OT Scriptures, these very Scriptures condemned their present position. This brings up two very important issues by His use of that verse:

(1) The Jews' hatred of Jesus showed they were doing exactly what their own Scriptures predicted they would do (15:25). As noted above, their real father was Satan, and their love and loyalty was for the world. How many in the church are following this pattern today? They profess to love God, but their self-deception and love for the world prove otherwise.

(2) The following verse (26) expands on that quoted psalm, applying it to Jesus' servants in His absence. "*The Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father*" is a reference to the *mission* of the Spirit as a *parallel* to the mission of the Son as "*coming from the Father.*"

II. The Testimony of the Spirit (15:26, 27)

1. Verse 26 is in the *future* tense, but verse 27 is a *present* tense because they were chosen to accompany Jesus from the beginning of His ministry. The response of the Jews to Jesus would continue after Jesus was gone because the Spirit would take His place and continue His witness through the disciples.
2. The first witnesses served as models for future believers. John prepared his readers by explaining in detail that "what happened back then" would continue. The age-old conflict would remain a present and future expectation.
3. The witness must always be about Jesus—His words, works, sacrifice, and resurrection—the gospel.

III. The Danger Inherent in Persecution (16:1–4a)

1. The greatest danger disciples will face is not *death* but *apostasy*—falling away from Christ. Scripture warns against taking "offense" (John 6:61). The disciples demonstrated the very issue of which Jesus warned them (Mark 14:27–31). "*Blessed is the one who is not offended in me*" (Matthew 11:6). All the disciples would experience a "*falling away*" that very night. Only the doctrine of election secures believers against the inevitable. Scattered sheep will be sought out by the Shepherd. But what of those who truly apostatize? John later wrote of them (1 John 2:19; 5:18–21).
2. Jesus explained the nature of the threat in verse 2. "*The hour is coming*"—all was tied to Jesus' hour. The rage of the Jews to put Jesus to death would also drive their vengeance against His own. The first expression of this would be Jewish authorities' excommunicating Christians from the synagogues. The persecutors would think they were doing God a service (*latreia*, a service of *worship*, Romans 12:1, 2).
3. The counter to the danger is knowing what to expect. This protects the believer in persecution (16:3, 4a) The ultimate cause of persecution is that the persecutors do not "know" the Father or the Son. Knowing the Son is the only way to know the Father, which is salvation (14:7, 17:3). Not knowing the Son spawned the hostility directed at those who did know Him (vv. 18–21).

Lessons

1. Resistance to Christ and His church is natural and expected.
2. The natural tendency of every child of Adam is to resist and rebel against divine authority, however expressed—even for believers.
3. Only the election of grace rescues sinners from judgment, and only the words of Christ ministered in the power of the Spirit prevent them from falling away.