

***John 15:18-16:4***

"If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you." 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." Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. "But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me."

If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. "He who hates Me hates My Father also." If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have both seen and hated Me and My Father as well. " But they have done this to fulfill the word that is written in their Law, 'THEY HATED ME WITHOUT A CAUSE.'

"When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, and you will testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning."

These things I have spoken to you so that you may be kept from stumbling. "They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God." These things

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they will do because they have not known the Father or Me. "But these things I have spoken to you, so that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them. These things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you."

Wow, after all this talk about the branch and the vine and the wonderful benefits of abiding in His love, Jesus all of sudden drops a bomb about some of the other implications of abiding—we will be hated, persecuted and even killed. That must have gotten everyone's attention. You can picture the heads snapping around and the guys all staring at each other thinking: "Wait a minute, what do you mean we will be hated and killed? We're barely swallowing this whole idea that you are going to die but now you are making it all a little too personal."

In the final hours of Jesus life He focused on bringing to fruition the fullness of His instruction to His disciples. It had been 3-years that they were following Him and sadly they understood little of what He taught them. But still while they followed they were always safe from harm, protected and cared for. But it seemed as if now everything would change—everything.

Culturally, there were so many expectations that they had for being a disciple and it did not include being hated by the world. In fact, just the opposite, they fully expected to be embraced by the world. Therefore, you have to try and appreciate how what Jesus said would have totally messed with the disciples' minds and emotions. On this final evening before His death, Jesus turned upside down and inside out the entire cultural dynamic of discipleship.

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This should not have been so surprising since, from the beginning, everything Jesus did was counter-cultural. You see in Jewish culture, a young man would choose the rabbi that they most wanted to emulate and they would go to this rabbi and submit to testing to see if they would be accepted by the rabbi. If they were accepted they would bind themselves to this man and follow Him everywhere he went for the purpose of learning all that they could about the Torah. This rabbi served as the bridge between the student and the scriptures; He taught them how to understand and interpret the Torah. This was the way it was always done; no Jewish boy would ever be so arrogant as to venture out on their own accord to try and “understand” the words of the Lord. This is the reason discipleship was so important to the Jewish way of life.

A student also knew that one day if they studied real hard they would be a great leader of the people, just like their teacher, and share in the privileges of being part of this exclusive group that were the only ones who could understand and interpret the Law of God. Besides, if a disciple was extremely bright, one day their wisdom might exceed even that of their own teacher and they might become one of the greatest rabbi’s in Israel.

Now being a rabbi in Israel was a big deal. It was the ticket to honor, prestige, wealth, respect, and social deference. They were the elite of society and were revered by the people. In addition, any rabbi worth his stuff would always have a group of people who followed him everywhere and lived by every word that he spoke and every move that he made. It was quite a career and quite an ego trip.

But Jesus view of discipleship was entirely different. He had different aims, different methods, and went for entirely different results. First of all, Jesus chose

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His disciples, they did not choose Him. He consulted with the Father and then personally chose each and every one of them. Jesus did not evaluate their skills and abilities and choose the ones who were smart and learned; rather, He knew those who were His own, He knew their hearts, He knew who they would become in Him. Thus, He went out and found them and personally chose them to follow.

Second, the training of His disciples was more personal than it was educational. He was not just a teacher passing through His knowledge to the next generation; He was God making His disciples into His very own children. You see His disciples would not one-day achieve some level of mastery based on their “knowledge” of the scripture and be able to stand on their own or excel beyond the capabilities of their teacher; they would always be dependent upon their master. At best, they could be like Him—in the most literal of senses—as He has made it clear that His design for their discipleship is that as they learn to trust themselves to Him He will live in and through them. You see He would never leave; He would always be with them as Jesus’ discipleship was based on a permanent relationship and not a temporary arrangement.

Third, this was a discipleship that would literally never end. The Holy Spirit would lead them in truth and would forever be the bridge between them and the living Word of God. He would personally bring illumination to Jesus and everything Jesus had said. He would lead them in truth. He would teach them to live in need, to live in desperation and to cling to Jesus with everything. However, this was not something they could understand intellectually but it was something that had to be personally experienced through the invasion of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit within their being.

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Fourth, this discipleship was not going to result in their immediately becoming these great leaders of Israel with all the power, prestige, wealth, and respect of the rabbis. Now, one day they would share in the glory of God and they would even rule and reign with Christ on this earth for 1,000 years. So the glory would come but for now their discipleship was about identification with their master in all things and in all ways. In other words, they were to daily choose to be identified with Christ and follow their rabbi. This meant that instead of being revered, honored, and respected, like Jesus they would inevitably be reviled, persecuted, hated and even killed.

So everything about being a disciple of Jesus was counter-cultural to what they had known and were expecting. This is because this discipleship was not about temporal things and achieving success in this life. Jesus said the kingdom of God was at hand (***Matthew 10:7***). Thus, His discipleship is about the invasion of the supernatural into the natural. It is about the presence of Christ here on this earth. It is about His life being lived in and through our bodies, which explains why the experience of true disciples is similar to Jesus' experience because in reality the "world" is just continuing their hatred and persecution of Jesus who lives in us.

Paul understood that His life was an extension of Christ's life and His suffering was Christ's suffering. He phrased it this way:

***Colossians 1:24-25***

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.

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This is a bit odd as we think that the cross was the “end all and be all” in terms of Christ’s suffering. With regard to the Father and the Son and the judgment for sin, the cross was the final word and Jesus was eternally victorious. But between Jesus and His enemies, the persecution of Christ is ongoing and His sufferings did not end with His death (*Psalm 110*). One day they will end and Christ’s victory will be known by all, but for now they continue and we have the privilege, as Paul says, of filling up the sufferings of Christ or completing the sufferings.

Why do you think people hate Jesus so much and in turn hate His true disciples? After all what did He do but die for them? It just does not make sense the kind of animosity and venom that people have for Jesus. Jesus addressed this back in John 8.

***John 8:42-47***

Jesus told them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, because I have come to you from God. I am not here on my own, but he sent me. Why can't you understand what I am saying? It's because you can't even hear me! For you are the children of your father the devil, and you love to do the evil things he does. He was a murderer from the beginning. He has always hated the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies. So when I tell the truth, you just naturally don't believe me! Which of you can truthfully accuse me of sin? And since I am telling you the truth, why don't you believe me? Anyone who belongs to God listens gladly to the words of God. But you don't listen because you don't belong to God."

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The devil hates God and hates the people of God. In fact, the devil lives to wage war against what the Bible calls the offspring of Israel—those that keep God’s commandments and confess that they belong to Jesus (***Revelation 12:17***). So if he hates us then his children will also hate us as he will inspire his children to hate and persecute us.

When you start to let the Word of God be authoritative over your life it can seem so extreme because God requires you to change how you view everything and everyone. For example, although this is a bit shocking to our 21<sup>st</sup> century mindset, the Bible puts everyone into two camps. You are either a child of God or a child of the devil. Chew on that one for a while! Doesn’t go down easy does it! However, when you start to let this be your truth, you realize that this physical existence is not where *real* life takes place. We are spiritual beings who live spiritual lives. ***Colossians 3:3*** says that our real life is hidden with Christ in God.

Jesus explained to us the ramifications of His discipleship so we would not be surprised when His reality becomes our reality. He did not want us to stumble when the dark forces of wickedness wage bloody war against us. This is why we make such a huge mistake when we live as if this life is about what we do, what we have, who we know, how we are esteemed, and all the other petty concerns of this life in the flesh.

Jesus wants us to believe that we are spiritual beings and live as one who has the privilege of bringing the kingdom of God to people who belong to the kingdom of the devil. Besides, whether you know it or not you are right smack dab in the middle of this huge spiritual battle and although men and women are

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the instruments that the enemy uses, they are just tools and our real battle is against the armies of Satan.

***Ephesians 6:12-13***

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

In addition, our battle against these spiritual forces is not fought by fleshly means and it will not be won with our strength, our intellect, our cleverness, or our ability to argue and debate, but our battle is fought with spiritual weapons that are divinely powerful.

***2 Corinthians 10:3-5***

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God

If we don't understand the spiritual nature of both our existence and our fight we will make the mistake of making enemies out of the men and women who come against us. This is not God's will. Believe me; it is so easy to be taken captive by what is happening to you that your emotions get all out of whack and you



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want to take it out on others. But people are not your enemies they are just tools who, for the most part, are not even aware that they are being used. One of the main reasons we are NOT to consider these people our enemies is that our job is to tell them the truth about Jesus. But get this, even this job is a spiritual task and not something we can do in our flesh.

***John 15:26-27***

"When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, and you will testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning.

The Holy Spirit always reveals to us Jesus. As we study His Word, the Spirit reveals to us all that we need to know—even, as we discussed last week, the secrets of God. In turn, we are to share this truth with others and testify about all that we know.

Are you getting the picture? Your existence is a spiritual existence. You have been made into a *New Creation* which exists in the image of God. You are empowered by spiritual resources to fight spiritual enemies. You have been entrusted with spiritual truth. Open your eyes and start seeing your life through the lens of the kingdom of God having invaded this earth and not through your eyes of flesh.

I want to talk a little more about the people which the evil one uses for His purposes—the men and women that come against us. As we studied last week,

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our *Old Sinful Nature* is an enemy of God and is always hostile to God (**Romans 8:5-8**). Therefore, if we live according to our *Old Sinful Nature* we cannot please God. In fact, we might even find that we are used as tools of the enemy. With that said, it should not be too hard to understand how vulnerable unbelievers are to the inspiration of the enemy. Their nature is similar to the devils; they both hate God. Therefore, the fact that they treat us as enemies should not come as a surprise. Now, don't get me wrong; I am not saying that people are even aware of how they are being used, but their nature allows easy access for the enemy to work his deeds.

Let's examine how Jesus described some of those who would hate, persecute, and even want to kill us. First He said: "The world has hated me." This makes sense as most of us think about the atheist, the agnostic, the educator, the politician and all those who think this notion of God is ridiculous. Most of us have faced some level of ridicule and have been treated poorly by such people just because we call ourselves Christians. Although it hurts, what most of us have gone through is really nothing on the scale of persecution that is experienced around the world. Do you realize that living in this country we have so far been protected from the brutal forms of hate and persecution which our brethren in other countries face? Yes, some of our brethren are in countries whose entire social and political system is based on the hatred and rejection of God and, as a result, they hate and reject anyone who believes.

I am going to read some excerpts which I found in various reports on the persecuted church. I just want to give you an idea of the horrors which face many true believers.

Many believe that the primary persecutor of the Church today is militant Islam. While it is true that the rate of violence against Christians is growing in many Muslim nations, perhaps the most dangerous nation on earth for someone to openly confess Christ is communist North Korea. Christians there are brutalized in prisons or summarily executed if caught with a copy of the Scriptures.

China's crackdown on rapidly growing and unregistered Christian groups belies the popular dogma that increased trade with a nation will inevitably lead to a greater degree of freedom and respect for human rights. Church leaders continue to be detained, tortured, and drugged in Vietnam. Sadly, as we enter the 21st century, we still find that more Christians suffer at the hands of Communist authorities than any others, just as they did through most of the past 100 years.

China Aid Association (CAA) reported that since the end of the Olympics in Beijing, cases of religious persecution have increased. CAA has received reports of intensified religious persecution in Beijing, Heilongjiang, Yunnan and Shangdong provinces. In Beijing, Pastor "Bike" Zhang Mingxuan and his family members have been evicted from their home, beaten and arrested. In Heliongjiang province, one city called Yichun recently banned all house churches, CAA reported. In Yunnan province, some house church members were attacked right after the Olympics. In Shandong province, Pastor Zhang Zhongxin was sentenced to two years of re-education through labor, and after the Olympics his appeal was denied, according to CAA.

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Meanwhile, CAA has learned that 29 house church leaders have been serving time in labor camps and prisons in Henan province since July 2007. They are accused of being "evil cult" members. One leader was sentenced to seven years imprisonment, which is the harshest sentence against a house church leader in recent years.

Christians have become the targets of opportunity to the thug regimes around the world, and they are many. What's going on now is monumental, and it's affecting millions, tens of millions, of people. We're talking not about discrimination, but persecution of the worst sort: slavery, starvation, murder, looting, burning, and torture. The World Evangelical Alliance estimates that 200 million Christians live in societies where they daily face the threat of being imprisoned, tortured, and killed because of their identity as Christians

Jesus does not stop with addressing the "world" but he also says something that cuts real close to the bone and can be difficult for most believers to accept. He says that those who hate us, persecute us, and kill us will think they are "offering service to God" and that they will do all this "for His names sake." Excuse me. Did we read that correctly? "For His name's sake," how is that even possible?

This means that there will be a community of people who think they call on the name of Jesus, who think they belong to Him, yet who are really just tools of the enemy. These are people who come out of the church. They will look like Christians, talk like Christians, act like Christians and even hold position of power

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and authority in the church. Jesus said that they would kick us out of synagogues so they must have the power and authority to carry out these deeds.

However, despite their pretense of true Christianity, Jesus makes it clear that they do not know either Him or His Father. This is scary to think that there are enemies in our midst—wolves who look like sheep. But we are being naïve to think that everyone who calls on the name of Jesus is a true disciple for history is replete with story after story of true disciples being persecuted and killed by the religious authorities of the day (just like those who persecuted Jesus).

We have tasted some of this in our own fellowship as we have been vilified not so much by those of the “world” but by those within in Christianity who have decided that we do not belong and that we are not doing “church” the way it is supposed to be done.

Honestly this has surprised me and has been hard for me to swallow. I thought that being in Boulder we would get persecuted by all those who are all spiritual but want nothing to do with Jesus. But that has not really been the case; our persecution has come from those who hold power and authority within Christendom. Honestly, I am expecting it to get worse as Jesus begins to use this fellowship to open the eyes of the blind, to free the captives from prison and release those who sit in dark dungeons.

All of this reminds us that we need to be busy praying for the persecuted church around the world. Persecution is inevitable for as Paul says: “all those who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (**2 Timothy 3:12**). But with that said, we are still instructed to pray that we God might allow us to live a

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peaceful life free from persecution. This is how we should be praying not only for our fellowship but for every true disciple of Jesus around the world.

**1 Timothy 2:1-4**

First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

How many of you pray for the President, for the Congress, or for world leaders? Do you pray for those who employ you or are in authority over you? Many of us blow this off for a few reasons: 1) the persecution is not really that bad so we don't think much about it, 2) we're out of touch with what happens in other countries, and 3) we don't think these kinds of prayers will have any impact. Let's not be so foolish; praying that the rulers, authorities, and those who employ us let us live a peaceful life is a prayer in the will of God. And we know that if we pray according to His will that He not only hears us but acts on behalf of those prayers (**1 John 5:14-15**). So despite what you might think, your prayers are not wasted. Therefore, we must remember to cover each other and the persecuted church around the world by praying for all who are in authority over our lives.

Now let's deal with a very strange part of our text.

**John 15:22-25**

"If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin." He who hates Me hates My Father also. "If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have both seen and hated Me and My Father as well." But they have done this to fulfill the word that is written in their Law, 'THEY HATED ME WITHOUT A CAUSE.'

This is a prophetic statement that speaks to time past, present and future. It is very similar to what Jesus said in **John 9:41**: "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, 'We see,' your sin remains." Let me lay the scene. Before the cross, sin separated man from God; it was a hard barrier which could not be breached. That is why when men died they did not go into the presence of God because sin had yet been atoned for. But on the cross, Jesus died for all sin—past, present, and future. As a result, sin no longer stands as a barrier between God and man. This is why Paul says that Jesus is the Savior of all men especially for those who believe (**1 Timothy 4:10**).

However, you must understand that even though the penalty for sin has been paid in full this does not mean that everyone is "saved" from eternal judgment. The problem is that although the sins of unbelievers have been atoned for they are still not holy or perfect like God, but are men and women whose base nature is corrupted by evil. But to be in the presence of God you have to be like God: holy and perfect. And there is only one way for men of flesh to become holy and perfect and that is by letting Jesus give them new life—His life.

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To receive this life, a person must accept Jesus' sacrifice for their sins, they must believe that Jesus is God, and choose to trust themselves to Him; and, if they do, He will make them into these *New Creations* with an entirely new nature that is in His perfect image: righteous, holy and true (***Ephesians 4:24***). "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" (***Acts 4:12***).

Alternatively, if a person chooses to reject Jesus as their sole source of salvation, they will seal their own eternal fate. Jesus came to earth and did things that were impossible. They saw it, they experienced it, and they wrote about it. We have heard about it and we know all about it; and it is our knowledge of His incarnation that will testify against everyone who does not believe.

### ***John 3:19-21***

This is the ***judgment***, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. "For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed."

The Father has made the eternity of every man and woman hinge on what they decide about Jesus. ***John 16:9*** says: "the world's sin is that it refuses to believe in me." You see by personally paying with His own blood the penalty for the sins of our flesh, Jesus became the exclusive *pathway* to the Father. There is simply no other possible route a person can take; it's Jesus or nothing. That is why John



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wrote: "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (**John 3:36**).

I know that this sounds very exclusive and intolerant and may rub your 21<sup>st</sup> century sensibilities the wrong way, but it is our belief or unbelief in Jesus that will be the determinant of our eternal destiny. To love Jesus is to love the Father. To reject Jesus is to reject the Father. To hate Jesus is to hate the Father. It is very simple and clear. And guess what? The Father has given each person the power to choose and He has made Himself known to each person so that they are without excuse.

### ***Romans 1:18-20***

But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness. They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them. For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.

They know the truth, they have the knowledge, and the power to choose is in their hands. Their choice will be their judge.

In looking back on this whole passage and thinking about how the disciples would have processed everything, I realized that although it seemed to them like everything was about to change, in reality not much was going to change. How

they lived with Him physically for the past 3-years was the model for how they (and us) were going to live with Him for the rest of their lives. They were to trust themselves to Him, follow Him wherever He leads, and hide in His love. And despite any persecution in this life, they were going to be safe and cared for and their eternity preserved and one day ushered directly into the presence of God. This is the blessing of being a true disciple of Jesus.

Let's Pray