

Why Are Christians Hated?

John 15:17-16:4

June 21st, 2026

1. _____ does the world hate us? (15:7-25)
 - a. The world will treat us the same way it treated _____. (15:17-21)
 - b. Greater _____ brought greater _____. (15:22-25)
2. What should we _____ when the world hates us? (15:26-16:4)
 - a. _____ about Jesus. (15:26-27)
 - b. Don't _____ Jesus. (16:1-4)
3. Applying the Word
 - a. Are you being mistreated for Jesus or for _____?
_____?
 - b. Don't be _____, discouraged, embittered, or dissuaded by opposition to Jesus.

Questions for Discussion/Reflection on John 15:17-16:4

1. What are some ways that Christians (maybe even you) experience hostility in America? How is it similar and how is it different than the treatment of Christians in other parts of the world?
2. How does our expectation of the Christian life affect our response when hardship and opposition occur? How does Jesus set realistic expectations in this passage?
3. How does the command in v. 17 provide a stark contrast with the warnings in the verses that follow? How should the treatment of fellow believers in the local church provide a welcome reprieve to hostility outside of the church?
4. Read the following verses and summarize what they teach about "the world:"
 - a. John 1:10; 3:16-17; 7:7; 8:23; 9:39
 - b. 1 John 2:15-16
5. Compare John 15:20 with John 13:16 and Matthew 10:24. What is the context and main idea in each passage?
6. Why does Jesus reintroduce the coming of the Holy Spirit in vv. 26-27? How does it fit in the context?
7. How can the content of this section accomplish the goal that Jesus states that we would "be kept from stumbling"? (16:1)

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Big idea: Don't be discouraged when we receive the same response from the world that Jesus received.

Intro

The history of Christianity is a history of persecution and expansion.

3,000 people respond to the gospel in Acts 2 but a "great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem and they were all scattered" in Acts 8:1. As they scattered, they took the gospel into new places.

Garth Rosell of Gordon-Conwell, "[Within 150 years,] the name of Christ was either known, revered, or persecuted in every Roman colony."

Persecution came initially from the Jewish opposition in Acts, which makes sense as the spread of Christianity began in Jewish circles, but expanded out to include gentile opposition and government opposition.

Rosell says that persecution broke out sporadically throughout the Roman empire, but there were two great movements: 245 – 251, 284-305 – truly empire wide, illegal from time of Emperor Trajan in late 1st century up until Constantine persecution actually varied.

Decius 245-251 – one empire, one religion policy. Christianity must go.

And yet by the end of the 2nd century, estimates are that 10% of the Roman population were Christians.

What about today? We're gathered here in peace but one estimate is that 8,000 Christians are killed as a direct result of their faith every year (Heneghan, "Christian Persecution"). Another study found 111 countries who either restrict or are hostile to Christianity (ibid.). It's reported that more than one hundred million Christians are suffering persecution around the globe. (Zaimov, "Over 100 Million").

Why are Christians subject to such persecution? If we are supposed to be a group of people marked but sacrificial love for each other, as Jesus has been teaching in John 13-15, why will we be hated?

In the end of John 15 Jesus answers that question.

Actually, two questions Jesus answers:

Why does the world hate us?

What should we do when the world hates us?

We might not experience the same overt violence as other believers are currently experiencing in other places, but every Christian should be prepared for it. Not by accumulating weapons, but by developing an understanding of why persecution happens and how we should respond.

1. **Why** does the world hate us? (15:7-25)

a. The world will treat us the same way it treated **Jesus**. (15:17-21)

i. V. 17 could belong with the previous section. It repeats the command from v. 12. However, it also provides a great contrast with what is to come.

ii. Inside, we are to be a community of mutual love for each other. Outside, we may experience great hostility.

1. We can handle hostility outside when there is love and unity inside. When the hostility makes it inside, we're in trouble.

iii. "If..." not "in the unlikely event the world hates you" but "if...and trust me, they will."

1. As a norm for his people at some time and in some way, we'll experience it.

- iv. The purpose of this whole section is to eliminate surprise when persecution happens.
 - 1. We're much better at handling hardship when we know its coming and can understanding it better.
 - 2. In contrast with the love for each other, this is what we should expect from the world. We might not always get it. There might be more tolerant societies. Societies that are more hospitable to Christianity. But we shouldn't be surprised if we encounter the opposite.
- v. What is the world?
 - 1. The world is the moral order in rebellion against God, opposed to God in its thinking and behavior.
 - 2. We were all once part of "the world" but have been rescued from the world (v. 19)
 - a. We did belong to this world, we were "of the world" and the only reason we are not still is because he rescued us out of the world. No room for boasting or pride.
- vi. The world hated Jesus because He exposed their sin and need for a savior.
 - 1. **John 7:7** "The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil.
- vii. If we carry the same message the world might hate us in the same way and for the same reason.
 - 1. Hatred that comes from saying, there is a standard of holiness that is above and outside of us. Morality is not defined by culture but by God and we're all accountable to it. And there is forgiveness in Jesus, but only in Jesus.
 - 2. Jesus was hated for identifying sin, even among the self-righteous and for identifying Himself as the only solution. (John 8)
 - 3. "God loves you but He is a righteous God with a moral standard and you've broken it. Your attempts to cover it with prideful self-righteousness only make it worse. But God sent Jesus to rescue us. But we must see our need for rescue and trust in the rescuer."
 - 4. How do we practically experience the hatred of the world?
 - 5. Whatever it is, it is similar to the hatred that was shown to Christ.
 - 6. "I'm sorry, I can't affirm that this same sex marriage is compatible with God's design for marriage."
 - 7. Giants baseball players writing Gen 9 on their required rainbow hats for pride night
 - 8. Randy Newman the lone representative for a conversionary perspective on a campus interreligious group
 - 9. David Nasser described his Muslim parents kicking him out of the house when became a Christian as a teenager
- viii. If we didn't have a contradictory message but went with the flow, we would be accepted by the world.
 - 1. That's true in a western liberal country that prizes tolerance and pluralism above all other things.

2. That's true in a restrictive, religiously controlled community with one prominent non-Christian religion.
 3. Both are very different from each other but both are "the world."
- ix. A slave is not greater than his master (v. 20)
1. The last time he quoted that was in John 13:16 in the context of loving service as He washed the disciples' feet.
 2. Now quoted to anticipate hatred.
 3. We should love like Jesus and we will be hated like Jesus.
- x. But it isn't all negative – if they kept My word they will keep yours also (v. 20)
1. if they persecuted me (and many of them did), they will you; if they obeyed my teaching (and some of them did), they will obey yours also.
 2. People belonging to the world divide around Jesus' followers and their message exactly as they divided around Jesus and his message.
 3. Sometimes we think that we can just be winsome enough, nice enough, generous enough, etc. that the world will like us and accept us. Not if those things are combined with truth-telling and accuracy about the gospel. No one was more kind than Jesus, and yet He was hated.
- xi. Persecution comes for His name's sake.
1. **Acts 5:40-41** They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and *then* released them.
⁴¹ So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for *His* name.
- b. Greater **revelation** brought greater **guilt**. (15:22-25)
- i. In what way would they not have had sin?
 1. This doesn't negate the Bible's teaching that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23) and that we are born into sin (Ps 51:5).
 2. Carson: By coming and speaking to them Jesus incited the most central and controlling of sin: rejection of God's gracious revelation, rebellion against God, decisive preference for darkness rather than light.
 3. Similar to people told they will face more severe judgment than Tyre and Sidon - Mt 11:20-24
 - ii. They reject His words after hearing them (v. 22) and his works after performing signs (v. 24) – it's the rejection of the clearest light, the fullest revelation.
 - iii. Their hatred was without cause – quoting from Ps 69:4 or maybe 35:19 – both have the same concept.
 1. No legitimate cause for hatred. He spoke truth, performed miracles, modeled true sacrificial love and yet was hated for the truth.
 - iv. The one who hates Him hates His Father also
 1. Repudiates the argument that all monotheistic religions worship the same God.
2. What should we **do** when the world hates us? (15:26-16:4)

- a. **Talk** about Jesus. (15:26-27)
- i. Why bring the HS back up again? Does it seem out of place to teach about the Helper who will come?
 1. Turns from the cause of persecution to what we should do.
 2. Appropriate to remind them yet again that they will not be alone in this.
 3. How can we stand up under pressure and opposition? We have an advocate, a Helper.
 - ii. The Spirit will testify about Jesus – and we should as well.
 1. Written as an imperative – He will testify and you testify also.
 - iii. The temptation will be to close our mouths and withdraw.
 - iv. No one likes to be disliked.
 - v. In places of intense persecution, it may be a matter of valuing their own life. Even though we experience intense hatred for Jesus, we must talk about Jesus – testify about Jesus.
- b. Don't **leave** Jesus. (16:1-4)
- i. We are told this to keep us from stumbling. (v. 1)
 1. Carson – The greatest danger they will face is not death but apostasy
 2. In AD 155, Polycarp was sentenced to death but he would be spared if he would renounce his faith in Jesus. He was 86 years old. He had served Jesus for many decades. He might have reasoned, “God will forgive me. I’ve done lots of good. People will remember my faithfulness. I’ll spare myself this hardship.” Instead, he famously said, “86 years I have served him and he never did me any wrong. How can I abandon my King and Savior now?”
 - ii. The opposition might even come from religious motives. (v. 2)
 1. Because of their sinful nature, people take a good thing and use it for a bad purpose.
 2. Pre-conversion Paul is an example of this in the book of Acts.
 3. In an Open Doors USA annual report in 2022, the most dangerous country for Christians was Afghanistan because of the rule by a Islamic Sunni fundamentalist group. 80% of Christians killed for their faith in 2021 were killed in Nigeria by Muslim extremists and another 11% were killed in Pakistan. From their perspective, blasphemy laws are violated. The Christian idea that God descended to humanity in the incarnation of Jesus is blasphemous.
 4. Liberal secular societies have a similar effect. There’s an appeal to virtue to justify the suppression of views that don’t fit. The exclusivist position of Christianity is still out of step with a modern view of tolerance that goes beyond tolerating different views (which Christians would affirm) to: Accept all views as equally valid and don’t claim to hold the truth.
 5. “Religion is not the virus. Sin is. As a result, religion becomes a tool for human sinfulness.” (David A. Robertson)
 6. Tim Keller argues that the sin nature explains why religious and non-religious societies have perpetrated evil.

- a. “Societies that have rid themselves of all religion have been just as oppressive as those steeped in it. We can only conclude that there is some violent impulse so deeply rooted in the human heart that it expresses itself regardless of what the beliefs of a particular society might be – whether socialist or capitalist, whether religious or irreligious, whether individualistic or hierarchical.” Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God* pg. 56

3. Applying the Word

- a. Are you being mistreated for Jesus or for ***other reasons***?
 - i. **1 Peter 4:14-16** If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵ Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; ¹⁶ but if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.
 - ii. “My coworkers don’t like me because I’m a Christian” – but maybe they don’t like that you show up 15 minutes late and spend too much time on your phone.
- b. Don’t be ***surprised***, discouraged, embittered, or dissuaded by opposition to Jesus.

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