

THE HOLY SPIRIT GUIDES INTO ALL TRUTH

John 15:18-16:15

Key Verse: 16:13

“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.”

In 15:1-17, Jesus used the analogy of a vine and branches to explain his relationship with his disciples. It was not just a human relationship which would end at his death, but a spiritual relationship that is ongoing and life-giving. Jesus is the source of life, love, and light, and all spiritual nutrients that make us fruitful and joyful. As we remain in Jesus’ word and his love, we remain in Jesus and love one another as he has loved us. Otherwise, we can do nothing.

In today’s passage, Jesus teaches his people how to live in the world. Here “the world” does not refer to God’s creation; it is the world system that is under the power of the devil and hostile to God (12:31; 14:30; 16:11). This passage teaches that the world hates Jesus and his disciples; “hate” is repeated seven times. This is a strong word. Does the world really hate Jesus and his disciples? Let’s consider some instances. Recently in China, the political leaders realized that the number of Christians is growing so fast that they may soon outnumber communist party members. So they began systematic persecution using high tech surveillance. In an escalating violent war on Christians within Nigeria, 3,731 Christians were killed last year.¹ On a global scale, one in 9 Christians in the world experience high levels of persecution.²

Are Christians persecuted in the USA? We can worship Jesus and preach the gospel freely. We are in a much more favorable situation than those in Muslim countries. However, many of us have experienced persecution through family members, supervisors, or teachers. When I was a student at

¹ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2019/06/18/nigerian-kidnapping-christians-shows-american-church-must-act-column/1445442001/>

² <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/stories/christian-persecution-by-the-numbers/>

Oregon State, two different professors tried to discredit the faith of any Christian in their classroom. My life was not in danger, but their animosity was palpable. To some degree we can all expect to receive persecution. Apostle Paul said: “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2Ti 3:12).

The question is, how do we relate to this world? Let’s ask ourselves: “Am I a friend of the world?” “Am I intimidated by the world?” “Do I compromise with the world?” “Am I overcoming the world?” Surely we all want to overcome the world. How can we? Jesus teaches two things: to have a clear identity as his people, and to depend on the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit guides us into all truth. With his help, we can testify about Jesus and overcome the world.

I. Have a clear identity as Jesus’ people (15:18-25).

Jesus began with the words, “If the world hates you....” When we live a godly life, overcoming sinful desires and doing good works, we may expect to be praised by the world. Instead, the world may hate us and criticize our work. It is easy to be confused and discouraged. Jesus said, “...keep in mind that it hated me first” (18). Our reference point is not being popular in the world, but being like Jesus. If we are treated like Jesus was, we are on the right track. Jesus tells us why the world hates his people in verse 19: “If 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.” Jesus teaches us that there are two distinct realms: the world’s and God’s, and they cannot coexist. Those who belong to the world do not follow the truth of God; they follow the sinful desires of their hearts and are hostile toward God. Once, Jesus’ people belonged to the world. But Jesus chose us out of the world. We were transformed in mind and heart to have a new value system, hope and purpose based on the truth of God. Now we love God and one another. We desire to see God’s reign restored. We live as the light of the world. This frightens worldly people because the light exposes their evil deeds. So they hate Jesus’ people (Jn 3:20).

When we are hated by the world, there is a danger that we may take it personally, saying, “Why do you hate me? I didn’t do anything to you. Is something wrong with me?” Then we can fall into self-condemnation. At that moment, we should remember what Jesus said: “A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also” (20a). In Jesus’ times, servants belonged to their masters. In our times, it is similar to an employee working in the name of his company. For example, if a FedEx driver comes to the door, it is not for a personal visit; he represents his company. When we are persecuted, we must remember that it is simply because we belong to Jesus. Of course, if we have done something wrong, we need to repent. However, if we are persecuted in Jesus’ name we should thank God. It is a privilege to be considered worthy to participate in Jesus’ sufferings (Ac 5:41). Not all people of the world persecute us; some listen and obey our teaching. Then there is a danger of becoming proud. We should remember that Jesus said, “If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also” (20b). It is not us they obey, but Jesus.

The world hates and persecutes Jesus’ disciples because of Jesus’ name (21a). The root cause of their hatred of Jesus is their spiritual ignorance. They don’t know God, who so loved the world, and sent his Son Jesus to die as the Lamb of God to save people (21b). Jesus came to this world so that people may know God’s love and saving grace. Jesus mentions two ways in which he had revealed God’s salvation: through his words and through his works. Jesus said in verse 22, “If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin.” Jesus’ words are not just human words, they reveal God and his kingdom. They give eternal life (Jn 6:63). At the same time, they expose the wickedness of those who ignore God and glorify themselves. Such people’s guilt is laid bare; they have no excuse for their sin and should repent. Instead, they hate Jesus. In hating Jesus, they hate the Father, because Jesus and the Father are one (23; 14:10-11).

In addition to speaking lifegiving words, Jesus had done works among them that no one else could do (24a). Jesus healed a man who had been paralyzed for 38 years. Jesus gave sight to a man who was blind from birth. Jesus even raised a dead man to life again. Jesus did so many other great things that were not recorded. Jesus did these works so that people may

believe that he is the Messiah, the Son of God, and have life in his name (20:31). Many people saw these works with their own eyes but did not accept that Jesus came from God. Instead they hated Jesus and the Father as well (24). Jesus' words and works clearly reveal that he is God. Jesus had done only good things. There was no reason to hate Jesus. But this fulfilled what was written in their Law: "They hated me without reason" (25).

In this part, Jesus teaches us how to view the world. This is important for us as Jesus' disciples. Our worldview will guide our value system and lifestyle. Some Christians think of the world as a playground where they can have fun. They want to enjoy the things of the world and live a comfortable life. Other Christians think the world is so corrupt that they should be isolated from it. They become judgmental and fail to testify about Jesus. Still other Christians have one foot in the world and one foot in God. But we cannot love both God and the world. If we love the world, love for God grows cold (1Jn 2:15). This world is a spiritual battleground between God and the devil. We should not love the world, compromise with the world, nor be intimidated by the world. We should overcome the world. How? By remembering what Jesus has done for us. Jesus chose us out of the world and made us his children; we bear his name! Let's have a clear identity as his people. We do not belong to the world; we belong to Jesus!

II. Depend on the Holy Spirit (15:26-16:15)

Having a clear identity as Jesus' people is essential, but it is not enough for us to win the victory. There is a saying, "The best defense is a good offense." Jesus does not want us to live in a stalemate with the world, but to win the victory by testifying about him. To do this, we need the help of the Holy Spirit. Now Jesus tells us how the Holy Spirit helps us to be his witnesses.

Jesus said in verse 26, "When 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." Some people emphasize that the work of the Holy Spirit is to comfort and encourage us. It is true that he does this. If we need comfort, courage or wisdom, we can ask the Holy Spirit and he will help us. But that is not the point of his coming; he comes to testify about Jesus. For example,

Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (14:6). The world resists this teaching with rebellious defiance and subtle lies. But the Holy Spirit's power and wisdom pierces the world's resistance and reveals that this is true. Without the Holy Spirit's work, the world's resistance cannot be penetrated. We must depend on the Holy Spirit. At the same time, we also must testify. Jesus said, "And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning" (27). The word "testify" comes from "martyr" in Greek. It has the same root as "martyr." It means to testify about Jesus as a matter of life and death. The apostles were chosen by Jesus, had been with Jesus for three years and heard, saw and touched Jesus. Then Jesus commanded them to testify about him. Like the apostles, those who have experienced Jesus' grace and presence must testify about him. As we testify about Jesus, a great work of God will happen. Those who are suffering from the power of sin and death can receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life through the work of the Holy Spirit.

The environment the disciples were called to testify in was hostile, not favorable. How can anyone testify about Jesus in such circumstances?

First, remember Jesus' warning (16:1-4). Jesus warned his disciples that they would be cast out of the synagogues and killed. Surprisingly, strong opposition arose from religious leaders who thought they were serving God (1-2). They did these things because they did not know Jesus or the Father (3). This kind of spiritual ignorance in leaders is deadly. Theology professors who don't know God lead people into unbelief. Some influencers denigrate Christians through social media, thinking they are doing humanity a favor. When this happens, it is easy for us to be confused and shrink back. It may seem that testifying about Jesus is inconceivable. Jesus said, "I have told you this, so that when their 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" (4). When we remember Jesus' warning, we can keep persecution in perspective. Jesus knows all about it, it will be for a limited time, and he has already equipped us to go through it. When we remember Jesus' words, we can find comfort, courage and strength to testify about him continually.

Second, understand the work of the Holy Spirit (5-15). In verses 5-7, Jesus taught that he must leave in order for the Holy Spirit to come. According to God's time schedule, Jesus was going back to the Father after finishing his salvation work. But no one asked him, "Where are you going?" (5). Rather, they were filled with grief (6). All they could think about was that Jesus would not be with them anymore. They wondered who would protect them, guide them and feed them. Their hearts were troubled by a sense of loss and fear. But Jesus said, "Very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (7). Jesus' going away was really for their good. Although Jesus is the Son of God, he was limited by time and space. So he could not be with all of them at the same time in different places. The Holy Spirit, however, is not limited. The Holy Spirit can be with all of them simultaneously and help each of them at any time and any place. When they needed comfort, the Holy Spirit would comfort them. When they needed courage, wisdom or strength, the Holy Spirit would give it to them. Jesus' leaving was not an eternal separation, but the start of a new union. It was also time for them to deepen their dependence on God through the Holy Spirit. Those who learn to depend on the Holy Spirit can overcome their weaknesses and become powerful witnesses of Jesus.

In order to depend on the Holy Spirit, the disciples needed to understand the Holy Spirit's work. In verses 8-11, Jesus taught how the Holy Spirit works in the world. Jesus said, "When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment..." (8). Here "prove" means "convict." The Holy Spirit rebukes unbelieving people and convicts them that they are sinners and they are wrong before God. Specifically, the Holy Spirit rebukes regarding sin, righteousness and judgment. Jesus said in verse 9, "...about sin, because people do not believe in me." The primary sin the Holy Spirit rebukes is unbelief in Jesus. Most people do not think of unbelief as a serious problem. Of course, they will say that murder, adultery, and stealing are sin. And they will agree that such things deserve punishment. However, they think of unbelief simply as a matter of personal preference and would be shocked if unbelief was punished. But in truth, unbelief is the most serious sin against God. It is offensive and the root of all sin. It is actually a deliberate rebellion against God. This rebellion

produces all kinds of hatred toward Jesus and reached its climax in his crucifixion.

Jesus said in verse 10, "...about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer." "Righteousness" is the way to be right with God. People have their own standards of righteousness. They ignore God's righteousness and become self-righteous (Ro 10:2-3). This makes them very proud and they become enemies of God. Perhaps no one can win an argument against them; but the Holy Spirit can rebuke them effectively. The Bible teaches that we can obtain God's righteousness only by faith in Jesus (Ro 1:17).

Jesus said in verse 11, "...and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned." The prince of this world, Satan, deceived mankind into believing that there is no judgment. People think they can sin freely without accountability to God. But God's truth is that the wages of sin is death (Ro 6:23a). And death is not the end. After death, there is eternal condemnation in the fiery lake of burning sulfur (Heb 9:27; Rev 21:8). However, through Jesus' death and resurrection, he condemned Satan and defeated him who held the power of death (Heb 2:14). Now, for anyone who is in Jesus, there is no condemnation (Ro 8:1).

Realizing how the Holy Spirit works in the world encourages us to testify about Jesus boldly. Regarding one of my aforementioned professors, I challenged him by faith during one class period and we had a hot debate. Though I was emotionally upset, I managed to share John 14:6 clearly. The professor seemed unaffected. But after class, at a lunch table with one of my friends, the professor recalled this encounter. Suddenly he turned dark, and said, "What if he is right?" It was the work of the Holy Spirit to convict him. Through that my friend accepted Jesus' word and told me about this later.

Jesus had much more to teach his disciples, more than they could bear at that time. Jesus entrusted them to the Holy Spirit (12). Then in verses 13-15 he taught how the Holy Spirit works in believers. Let's read verse 13. "But when he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what

is yet to come.” After Jesus left them, the disciples would feel lost. They would not know what to do, where to go, and whether they were on the right track. We can understand them. The world we live in is so relativistic, and full of the devil’s lies. People are deceived and deceive others. Moreover, we face so many challenges as we try to finish school, get married, raise children, and manage our finances. In the midst of this Jesus calls us to testify about him and raise disciples. How? The Holy Spirit is our guide. What a great guide! He knows the destination and the best way to get there. He knows us fully and how to lead us in the best way. He loves us and has our best interests at heart. He is able to manage everything; nothing is too hard for him. All we need to do is follow our guide day by day. He gives us peace to live boldly as God’s children.

Since the Holy Spirit is so amazing and wonderful, some people emphasize the Holy Spirit so much that they forget about Jesus. The Holy Spirit does not speak on his own; he speaks based on Jesus’ words. He also gives us prophetic insight to see the future, especially the signs of the end of the age and the glorious coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. So we are not stuck in present reality, but can live with God’s vision and hope.

Finally, the Holy Spirit will glorify Jesus (14-15). The Holy Spirit reveals who Jesus is, what Jesus said, and what Jesus has done. Just as Jesus’ mission was to glorify the Father, the Spirit’s mission is to glorify Jesus. Jesus is the focal point of the Spirit’s testimony. The focal point of our testimony should also be Jesus.

The world we live in is hostile toward Jesus. Moreover, we struggle just to survive and must face many practical problems. At times we feel confused, powerless and helpless. Yet in this passage Jesus taught very clearly that we belong to him, not to the world. The mission Jesus gave us is not just to survive, but to testify about him. To enable us to carry out this mission, he promised that the Holy Spirit would help us and guide us into all truth. Let’s depend on the Holy Spirit and overcome the world!