

# John 15:18-16:4

Last week our text was the well-known passage of the “vine and branches.” We learned how we are attached to Jesus in such a way that he provides for us everything we need so that we will bear fruit. Fruit, in this case, is loving each other the way Christ loved us. There’s much more to the text than that, but for our purposes this week, it is enough to say that the previous passage teaches us that there is a living connection between Christ and his disciples.

This week, we will see that this connection extends to more than just the ability to bear fruit that looks like the kind of fruit Jesus produced; it also extends to how we are treated by those in the world. We can expect to be treated the same way Jesus was treated. In order to help the disciples of Jesus when they are treated the same way as he was treated, he will send the Holy Spirit to them. (This “helper” was talked about in our text from two weeks ago; he makes his return this week.)

So let’s get to it...

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## 15:18

Notice that this verse is not a promise that the world will hate us. All it’s saying is that if the world (which we’ll define in a moment) does hate us, we are in good company because it hated Christ too. It should also, therefore, come as no surprise when the world does hate us. Even though one might think it strange that the world should hate people who love one another selflessly (as this was the defining outward characteristic of the disciples of Jesus in 15:1-17), keep in mind that this is the world that had no room for Jesus and the gospel.

The World. The narrator does not give us a definition of what, exactly, the world is. As best we can figure, the “world” is anything not aligned with Jesus. Ranging from those who are openly hostile to those who have no strong opinions about him, “the world” stands ready to hate the followers of Jesus.

Now, it may be tempting to claim that we are hated by the world because we are followers of Jesus. But a word of caution should be given here. In many instances the world hates the followers of Jesus for good reason! We can easily come across as arrogant, holier-than-thou, and prideful. The world has every right to hate us for these reasons. Jesus is not talking about this. What he is talking about is the world hating us when we bear the fruit we were created to produce: love for one another. Being hated for doing this is persecution. Being hated for being arrogant, holier-than-thou, and prideful isn’t; it’s the natural human reaction to bad behavior.

## 15:19

Several important points can be made from this verse:

- We are not “of this world.” (More on that later.)
- We are not “of this world” because Jesus chose us, we didn’t do it to ourselves.
- Because we are not “of this world,” the world hates us.

So what does it mean to be not “of this world”? Now, before you get all “our citizenship is in heaven” on me (as if John had a copy of Paul’s letter to the Philippians with him when he wrote this... or believed his intended reader would), let’s put our Hermeneutical Harnesses on and take a look at the text. What does it mean to be not “of this world”?

I suggest being “not of this world” is defined for us all the way back in... verse 16, where Jesus says: “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit...” This verse includes the themes also present in 15:19- chosen by Christ to produce something... something that the world will hate when it sees us doing. And so being “not of this world” means, simply, chosen by Christ to produce fruit. (And, as we already saw, the fruit we are to produce is our love for one another.)

### **15:20**

It’s fascinating (and by that I mean sad) why people attend church. Family values, social connectedness, tradition, my-wife-makes-me all make the list. (Although probably not in as great a number at Zion as in the “church” nationwide... thanks in large part to my predecessor.) And while I’d argue that motives don’t matter; what matters is that people are in church and are hearing the best news they will ever hear, it is interesting why people align themselves (knowingly or unknowingly) with Jesus.

It’s also interesting how churches “market” Jesus. Some take the angle that he’ll give you whatever you ask for (if you have enough, or the right kind of faith); others that he’ll prevent you from burning alive forever; and still others that he’s the big-brother you never had to keep you safe throughout your life. Churches go to great lengths to make Jesus suitable for people in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Across the board, it seems, Jesus is marketed as the One who will make your life, in one way or another, easier.

But what if we took Jesus at his word? What if we “sold” Jesus for who he said he is? What if we told people: “look, Jesus is the best thing to happen to you, and his death and resurrection are the best news you’ve ever heard. But follow him at your own risk; he doesn’t make life easier, he’ll make it harder in ways that you cannot imagine. So... you in?” I contend that this approach is not only HONEST, but will attract people who will actually contribute and be more “active members” of a local congregation than those who jumped in the Jesus Wagon because they confused it for a Gravy Train.

### **15:21**

By this time, you might be wondering: “why will the world persecute Christians for loving each other?” Jesus gives us the answer: the world will persecute his followers because it does not know the Father, and therefore cannot identify the behavior of Jesus’ disciples (when they are doing what they should be doing) as godly.

In other words, the moral compass of those who do not know the Father is off so much that they end up calling evil good and good evil.

### **15:22**

So what happens to “the world” that rejects and persecutes the followers of Jesus? Do they know what they are doing? Are they responsible for their actions? What will their fate be? (Can you see how this text progresses?)

It seems as though Jesus is saying that those who have never heard the gospel are not sinners. And that preaching the gospel to people might be dangerous because then they

run the risk of rejecting the gospel and incurring judgment. In other words, Jesus appears to be saying that ignorance is bliss.

Just a couple of observations:

- If Jesus is talking specifically about people he himself has spoken to, then the application of this verse is limited to those individuals.
- Jesus could also mean that he has spoken to all people through the testimony of his disciples; all people have been spoken to, therefore all people have no excuse for their sin.
- The sin here is specific to the sin of actively persecuting believers in Jesus for bearing the fruit Jesus wants them to bear: loving each other.

### **15:23**

This verse does away once-for-all with the belief that all religions lead to God. You cannot claim to have a relationship with God and at the same time not have a relationship with Jesus. “Well,” someone might say, “people may not believe in Jesus as the only way to the Father, but still respect him as a teacher or follow his moral example. Certainly they don’t HATE Jesus... hate is such a strong word.”

All throughout the gospel, Jesus has spoken about his hour being the reason why he has come into the world. It is clear from the gospels and epistles that the primary reason why the second person of the Trinity became man was to die for the sins of the world, be raised from the dead, and to return on the Last Day. It is equally clear from Scripture that salvation is found in the death, resurrection and second coming of Christ... and no other place.

And so when someone says they like the teaching of Jesus or they like the example Jesus set, they fail to understand what it was that Jesus taught and fail to see the example that he set. Jesus has come to them with his nail-pierced hands and told them that, in him, they have forgiveness, life and salvation... free. But these people say: “no thanks. I don’t want what you are giving me, I want to earn it. And so I will turn to the teaching of Buddha, Mohammad, Rome, or another to find a way to achieve salvation.” How is that anything but hate to the one who died for you?

### **15:24**

The immediate context is the signs Jesus performed as recorded by John in the gospel. The larger context would be anyone who has witnessed the resurrection (something that no one else has done), either in person or through the testimony of the apostles.

### **15:25**

I believe Jesus adds a quote from the Old Testament to show that, while tragic, his rejection was to be expected. He didn’t do anything wrong (and neither will his followers) to earn the world’s rejection and hatred. This is the way it is. This is the way it has to be.

### **15:26**

So up until this point, Jesus has painted a pretty bleak picture of what it means to follow him: unavoidable and Scripturally mandated hatred from the world. And so, finally, we come to some good news for those who would dare align themselves with the Lord!

We heard about the “Helper” before, all the way back in 14:16 and 26. There, the “Paraclete” was said to do the following:

- Will be with the followers of Jesus forever.
- Will teach the followers of Jesus all things.
- Will bring the followers to a remembrance of all Jesus said.

Now, the “helper” is said to bear witness to Jesus. The question is: to whom will the Helper bear witness: to the world or to the followers of Jesus only? I believe the answer to this question is found in the next verse...

### **15:27**

Who is it that the followers of Jesus bear witness about him to?

Notice that no restrictions are put on to whom the followers of Jesus bear witness. And since the followers of Jesus are tasked with the same responsibilities as the Spirit/Helper, then he, too, bears witness to all people concerning Jesus.

### **16:1**

It makes sense that the disciples would be thinking: “why is Jesus telling us all of this? Will there be a quiz when he’s done?” The reason why we are told that the Spirit does the same thing we do (and will be persecuted for) is so that we will not fall away.

There are many in the Church today that say a person, once saved, cannot lose his or her salvation. Here, Jesus says quite the opposite. If falling away were not possible, then the reason why Jesus has told his disciples what he has told them is pointless. Falling away is a possibility for the weak and strong in faith. But, in order to prevent it, Jesus has told us exactly what will happen to those who bear his name... and that they are not alone, they work alongside the Spirit of truth, the Helper, the Paraclete.

### **16:2**

The first half of this verse gives commentators fits! They say that excommunication from the Jewish synagogue was not something that went on in Jesus’ day, and so it must be the Apostle John imposing what was going on in the early church on what Jesus was writing. But the man who Jesus healed who was blind from birth was “cast out” in 9:34. So it is reasonable to assume that aligning oneself with Jesus ran the risk of negative repercussions even before Jesus was crucified. It is no wonder, then, that Jesus would be able to predict that his followers would be kicked out of the synagogue.

More than excommunication from an individual congregation (or even whole denomination), expulsion from the synagogue would have dealt a significant blow to the social standing (and even economic standing) of someone living in Judea in the first century. Kicked out of the synagogue, a follower of Jesus would then have to rely on the church for his or her social standing, economic security, and even physical protection. In other words, being kicked out of the synagogue would be a big deal to Jewish converts.

### **16:3**

Since it was such a big deal, followers of Jesus might be inclined to think: “wow! That’s bad! Excommunication from the synagogue! No way that’s part of The Plan. Something must have gone wrong if I am excommunicated! How could someone religious do such a thing to me and my family?!” The answer is here... and applies to very many of life’s circumstances: people do dumb things that hurt others because they do not know Jesus and therefore do not know the One True God.

Now, those who do know Jesus also do really dumb things... with alarming frequency... but this is an aberration. When those who don’t know Jesus do dumb things, we shouldn’t be surprised. Instead, we should be surprised when they do good things.

#### **16:4**

Jesus concludes the section by saying, more or less: don’t be surprised when all the things I have told you about come to pass. Stay the course! Remain faithful. It’s all going according to plan.