

Home group questions on John 15:18-16:4a

By Phil Bailey

Theme: The world will hate the disciples as it hated Jesus, but they should not fall or waver or stop testifying on this account. Jesus came not to condemn the world but to save all who believe (John 3:16-17) and his saving work won't be finished until people from every nation have had opportunity to hear the gospel and respond. That is why the Spirit will keep testifying about Jesus, even after he has gone back to heaven, and why the disciples must testify too (15:26-27). This testimony will continue to divide the world into those who hate Jesus (and his church) and those who obey him (15:20). So the disciples cannot escape being hated – especially as they now belong to Jesus, not the world, so they are no longer accepted by the world as it's own (15:19). Nor are they greater than Jesus (15:20) – if the Son of God couldn't be friends with everyone, who are we to think that we can be?! That's why, in this passage, Jesus gives a loving (16:1-4a), necessary (15:18-21) and sober (15:22-25) warning of what is in store for them; he really doesn't want them to fall away on account of persecution! If they fall away and abandon Jesus, there will be no hope of forgiveness left (implied by 15:22); like fruitless, withered branches, they will be cast into the fire (15:6). But if they endure, hatred brings the comforting reassurance that they do indeed belong to Jesus (v.19), with the promise of eternal life and peace (that's assuming they've not incurred hatred by their own stupidity, hypocrisy or ungodliness!). Equally, though accepting Jesus has earned them the world's hatred, vv.22-24 imply that they can rejoice because they know the Son *and* the Father (who is the opposite hatred; his very nature is love, cf. 1 John 4:8, 16). These verses also imply that they can rejoice because they are no longer considered guilty of sin – in Jesus, all condemnation has been removed (cf. 3:18)

Aim: Not to be surprised or discouraged by persecution, but draw comfort from belonging to J, having our sins forgiven, and having the Spirit testify with us.

Questions:

1. What manifestations of hatred/persecution for being a Christian would you find hardest to cope with?
2. How might you be tempted to turn away from Jesus in those situations?
3. Why can we not escape being hated by at least some people, some of the time, if we belong to Jesus? (See vv.18-21 especially)
4. Why should it be a comfort to know we belong to Jesus in moments of hatred/persecution?
5. What is the implicit comfort and assurance in vv.22-24 for those who love Jesus (however wobbly our love might be)?
6. Why must we still testify along with the Spirit (vv.26-27), even though some will respond with hatred?
7. How is it a comfort to know that the Spirit is testifying too?