

**Wiersbe Bible Exposition Commentary**  
**JOHN 15:18-27**

**WHAT IN THE WORLD IS THE SPIRIT DOING?**

This long section—John 15:18–16:16—is tied together by two important themes: the opposition of the world against the church, and the ministry of the Spirit to and through the church. Our Lord had been talking about love (John 15:9–13, 17), but now He is talking about *hatred*; and He used the word seven times. It seems incredible that anyone would hate Jesus Christ and His people, but that is exactly what the situation is today; *and some of that hatred comes from religious people*. In a few hours, the religious leaders of Israel would be condemning their Messiah and crying out for His blood.

Our Lord had openly taught His disciples that one day persecution would come. He mentioned it in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:10–12, 44) and in His “commissioning sermon” when He sent out the disciples to minister (Matt. 10:16–23). In His sermon denouncing the Pharisees, Jesus openly said that they would persecute and kill God’s servants (Matt. 23:34–35); and there was a similar warning given in His prophetic message on Mt. Olivet (Mark 13:9–13).

Throughout the Gospel of John, it is evident that the religious establishment not only opposed Jesus, but even sought to kill Him (John 5:16; 7:19, 25; 8:37, 59; 9:22; also note 11:8). As He continued His ministry, there was a tide of resentment, then hatred, and then open opposition against Him. So, the disciples should not have been surprised when Jesus brought up the subject of persecution, for they had heard Him warn them and they had seen Him face men’s hatred during His ministry.

Until the Lord returns, or until we die, we must live in this hostile world and face continued opposition. How can we do it? What is the secret of victory? It is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit of God in our lives. This is the key section in the Upper Room message about the Holy Spirit and His ministry.

Before we study this passage and see the threefold ministry of the Spirit to the church in the world, we must pause to remind ourselves just who the Holy Spirit is. The Holy Spirit of God is a Person; Jesus referred to the Spirit as “He” and not “it.” The Holy Spirit has a mind (Rom. 8:27), a will (1 Cor. 12:11), and emotional feelings (Gal. 5:22–23).

In John 15:26 all three Persons of the Godhead are mentioned: Jesus the Son will send the Spirit from the Father. Because the Holy Spirit is a Person, and is God, it means that the Christian has God indwelling his body! If we did not have the Holy Spirit within, we would not be able to serve the Lord in this present evil world. We are to walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16), worship in the Spirit (Phil. 3:3), and witness in the Spirit (Acts 1:8).

Christians can stand and withstand in the midst of the world's hatred because of the special ministries of the Holy Spirit.

### **The Spirit as Comforter Encourages the Church (John 15:18–16:4)**

We should begin by clarifying what Jesus means by “the world,” because the term is used in Scripture in at least three different ways. It can mean *the created world* (“the world was made by Him”—John 1:10), the world of *humanity* (“For God so loved the world”—John 3:16), or *society apart from God and opposed to God*. We sometimes use the phrase “the world system” to define this special meaning.

For example, when you listen to the radio news, you may hear the announcer say, “And now the news from the world of sports!” Obviously, “the world of sports” is not a special country or planet where everybody lives who is connected in some way with sports. “The world of sports” refers to all the organizations, people, plans, activities, philosophies, etc. that are a part of sports. Some of these things are visible and some are invisible, but all of them are organized around one thing—sports.

“The world” from a Christian point of view involves all the people, plans, organizations, activities, philosophies, values, etc. that belong to society without God. Some of these things may be very cultural; others may be very corrupt; but all of them have their origins in the heart and mind of sinful man and promote what sinful man wants to enjoy and accomplish. As Christians, we must be careful not to love the world (1 John 2:15–17) or be conformed to the world (Rom. 12:1–2).

Jesus pulls no punches when He tells His disciples that their situation in the world will be serious and even dangerous. Note the progress in the world's opposition: hatred (John 15:18–

19), persecution (John 15:20), excommunication, and even death (John 16:2). You can trace these stages of resistance as you read the Book of Acts.

Why does the world system, including the “religious world,” hate the Christian, the one who believes on Jesus Christ and seeks to follow Him? Jesus gave several reasons.

***We are identified with Christ (vv. 18, 20).*** If they hated Him, they will also hate those of us who are identified with Him. In John 15:20, Jesus quoted the statement He had made earlier (John 13:16), and the logic of it is clear. He is the Master; we are the servants. He is greater than we are, so He must receive the praise and glory. But the world will not give Him praise and glory! The world hates Him, and therefore the world must hate us. If with all of His greatness and perfection, Jesus does not escape persecution, what hope is there for us with our imperfections?

This principle is seen in some of the other images of the relationship between Christ and His own. He is the Shepherd and we are the sheep; and when they attack the Shepherd, it affects the sheep (Matt. 26:31). He is the Master (Teacher) and we are the disciples, the learners. But it is encouraging to know that when God’s people are persecuted, our Lord enters into their suffering, for He is the Head of the body and we are the members. “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?” (Acts 9:4) Anything that the enemy can do to us has already been done to Jesus Christ, and He is “with us” as we suffer.

***We do not belong to the world (v. 19).*** When we trusted Christ, we moved into a new spiritual position: we are now “in Christ” and “out of the world.” To be sure, we are *in* the world physically, but not *of* the world spiritually. Now that we are “partakers of the heavenly calling” (Heb. 3:1) we are no longer interested in the treasures or pleasures of sin in this world. This does not mean that we are isolated from reality or insulated from the world’s needs, so “heavenly minded that we are no earthly good.” Rather, it means that we look at the things of earth from heaven’s point of view.

The world system functions on the basis of conformity. As long as a person follows the fads and fashions and accepts the values of the world, he or she will “get along.” But the Christian refuses to be “conformed to this world” (Rom. 12:2). The believer is a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17) and no longer wants to live the “old life” (1 Peter 4:1–4). We are the light of the world and the salt of the earth (Matt. 5:13–16), but a dark world does not want light and a decaying

world does not want salt! In other words, the believer is not just “out of step”; he is out of place! (See John 17:14, 16, and 1 John 4:5.)

***The world is spiritually ignorant and blind (v. 21).*** If you had asked the religious leaders in Jerusalem if they knew the God they were seeking to defend, they would have said, “Of course we know Him! Israel has known the true God for centuries!” But Jesus said that they *did not* know the Father and, therefore, they could not know the Son (see John 16:3). The religious leaders knew a great deal about Jehovah God and could quote chapter and verse to defend their doctrines, but they did not personally know God.

This was not a new theme for our Lord to discuss, because He had mentioned it before to the religious leaders who opposed Him. “Ye neither know Me, nor My Father; if ye had known Me, ye should have known My Father also” (John 8:19). “Yet ye have not known Him; but I know Him” (John 8:55). Jesus had taught them the Word and had demonstrated His deity in miraculous signs and a godly walk; and yet the religious leaders of the nation were blind to His identity: “The world knew Him not” (John 1:10).

The religious world today claims to know God, but it does not want to bow the knee to Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the only Saviour of the world. Satan has blinded their minds (2 Cor. 4:3–4) and sin has blinded their hearts (Eph. 4:17–19). Like Saul of Tarsus, they are so convinced that their “religion” and “righteousness” are satisfactory that *in the name of that religion* they persecute God’s people!

***The world will not be honest about its own sin (vv. 22–24; 16:1–4).*** Once again, Jesus emphasized His words and His works. We have seen this emphasis throughout the Gospel of John (3:2; 5:36–38; 10:24–27; 14:10–11). The people had no excuse (“cloak”) for their sin. They had seen His works and heard His word, but they would not admit the truth. All of the evidence had been presented, but they were not honest enough to receive it and act on it.

This statement is parallel to what Jesus told the Pharisees after He had healed the blind man (John 9:39–41). They had to admit that Jesus had healed the man born blind, but they would not follow the evidence to its logical conclusion and put *their* trust in Him. Jesus told them that they were the ones who were blind! But since they admitted that they had seen a miracle, this made their sin even worse. They were not sinning in ignorance; they were sinning against a flood of light. Why? Because that light revealed their own sin and they did not want to face

their sin honestly. Their attitude was similar to that described in 2 Peter 3:5—“For this they *willingly* are ignorant” (italics mine).

How does the Holy Spirit encourage believers when they are experiencing the hatred and opposition of the world? It is primarily through the Word of God. For one thing, the Spirit reminds us that this opposition is clearly expressed by various writers in the Scriptures. In John 15:25, Jesus quoted Psalms 35:19 and 69:4. The Word assured Him that the hatred of the world was not because of anything He had done to deliberately incite such opposition. We today can turn to passages like Philippians 1:28–30; 2 Timothy 2:9–12; Hebrews 12:3–4; and 1 Peter 4:12ff. We also have the encouraging words of our Lord found in the Gospels.

The Spirit also witnesses to us and through us during times of persecution (John 15:26–27). He reminds us that what we are experiencing is “the fellowship of His [Christ’s] sufferings” (Phil. 3:10) and that it is a privilege to bear reproach for His name. (Read *carefully* 1 Peter 4:12–19.) Times of persecution have always been for the church times of proclamation and witness. We must be “ready always to give an answer” when unsaved people attack us (1 Peter 3:15). The Spirit witnesses to us so that we can witness to the world (Mark 13:11). Apart from the power of the Spirit of God, we cannot give a clear witness for Christ (Acts 1:8).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, [\*The Bible Exposition Commentary\*](#), vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 359–361.