THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH

John 15:18–16:15

Key Verse: 15:26

“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.”

In these Upper Room dialogues in John 13–16 Jesus has been speaking with his disciples in the brief time he had left with them before he was arrested. He was preparing them for the reality of life without him. He commanded them to love one another and showed them how to do it himself by washing their feet and loving Judas Iscariot to the end. Though his leaving made them feel so insecure, he promised them a place in his Father’s house, promised to come back for them, said he’s the only way back there, and told them to do the works he had been doing, through faith and prayer. He promised that if they obeyed his teaching, the Holy Spirit would come as their new Advocate and teacher. He told them to remain in him, the true vine, so that they could bear much fruit. Now Jesus warns his disciples about the persecution they would face. It’s a very serious warning. But, he also promises them again that the Holy Spirit would come to be their Advocate and would guide them into all the truth. No one likes to be hated or attacked. Persecution makes us feel confused and fearful. But if we follow Jesus, we can’t avoid persecution. Through this study we especially want to understand better how the Holy Spirit helps those who follow Jesus. May God open our hearts and speak to us personally through his word today.

Read 15:18. Jesus begins by explaining why his disciples are hated by the world. First of all, it’s because the world hates Jesus. Why does the world hate Jesus? It’s because Jesus doesn’t tell people what they want to hear; he tells people only the truth he heard from God (8:40); he testifies that what people do is evil (7:7). As we follow Jesus and people begin to hate us, we shouldn’t think it strange (1Pe4:12); we should keep in mind that our Lord Jesus was hated first.

Jesus explains further. Read verse 19. Here’s another reason disciples of Jesus are hated. It’s because we don’t belong to the world. What does that mean? Basically it means Jesus gives us a new identity and a new value system. He changes us from worldly people to godly people. How does that make us different? The world loves the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. But now that we belong to Jesus, we have the love of the Father in us, we no longer love what the world loves, and we long to do our Father’s will (1Jn2: 15–17). This makes people of the world very uncomfortable to be around us because it challenges their entire way of life.

In verses 20 and 21 Jesus reminds his disciples that as his followers, they’re going to have to go through what he went through; there’s really no other way. There’s hope that some will obey the disciples’ teaching just as the disciples obeyed Jesus’ teaching. But there’s also the reality that they’ll be persecuted as Jesus was persecuted. This persecution mainly comes from people’s ignorance of God the Father. Look at verses 22–24. Jesus emphasizes several things here. First of all, he says twice that people hate him because they hate his Father as well. Why do people hate God the Father? Basically it’s because God is light; in him there is no darkness at all (1Jn1:5). Sinful people love darkness, and God’s light exposes that what they’ve done is evil (3:19–21). So they hate God’s light.

Next, Jesus emphasizes in verses 22–24 that he did two very special things during his ministry to shine God’s light in this dark world. First, he says he had “come and spoken to them,” and it was in a way no one ever had done before (7:46), meaning Jesus gave people God’s amazing words. Second, he says he “had done among them the works no one else did,” meaning the miracles Jesus performed, such as opening the eyes of a man born blind (9:32). And how did people respond to Jesus’ words and his works? He says “…they have seen, and yet they have hated both me and my Father.” Their response in no way proved that Jesus was wrong; it only showed their own guilt and irrationality. How could people hate Jesus who spoke such words of life and did such life-giving miracles? Read verse 25. Many people think unbelief is very reasonable, and faith is very unreasonable. But just the opposite is true—faith is very reasonable because it’s based on some amazing facts of what Jesus said and what Jesus did. In light of these facts, unbelief is just plain unreasonable.

In the midst of all this irrational hatred toward God the Father, Jesus the Son, and all his sincere followers, Jesus gives an amazing promise. Read verse 26. The disciples were going to hear all kinds of hateful lies about Jesus. But Jesus promised to send them the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, to testify to the truth about him. Jesus has already told them about this. He said in 14:16,17: “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.” He also said in 14:26, “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” Now Jesus repeats in 15:26 for the third time that the Advocate would come as the Spirit of truth and testify about him. It implies that we live in a world where there is so much falsehood. In fact, this world is full of the spirit of falsehood (1Jn4:6). People are so easily swayed to believe lies, especially lies about Jesus. In our sin we would prefer to ignore Jesus. We would prefer to have a distorted view of Jesus so we won’t have to repent. But the Spirit of truth comes to testify about Jesus. He comes to help us see all the truth that there is in Jesus, even though it can be so challenging and uncomfortable.

Read verse 26 again. This verse also means that as we experience persecution, we need the Holy Spirit to understand Jesus deeper. Without the Holy Spirit, if we face hatred and persecution we become afraid or depressed, and very quiet. But with our Advocate the Holy Spirit we can be courageous and full of hope. With our Advocate, the Holy Spirit, we can proclaim the truth about Jesus boldly, without fear of being hated. Jesus told his disciples that the Spirit would testify about him, but that they also should testify, because they had been with him from the beginning of his ministry (27). In their human strength they were too weak to testify about Jesus. Peter could only deny he knew Jesus before a servant girl. But when he received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost Peter could testify to the whole nation that though they crucified Jesus, God made him both Lord and Christ (Ac2:36). Many believers, when they received the Holy Spirit, testified boldly to their faith in Jesus.

Today we still live in a world that’s unbelieving. People don’t want to hear the gospel. People want to be free to do whatever they want and not face any consequences. People want to hear only what they want to hear, so they hide and pick and choose their own kind of news channel, ignoring what they don’t want to hear. People even think there’s no such thing as objective truth, that it’s only subjective truth, tribal truth. We can feel overwhelmed. May God grant us the Holy Spirit so that we can testify to people clearly about Jesus.

In 16:1–4 Jesus again explains why he was predicting persecution. He says in verse 1 it was “so that you will not fall away.” In verse 2 he says they’d be excommunicated, and those who persecuted them would think they were righteously serving God. This was partly fulfilled when Paul persecuted the early church, before his conversion. In verse 3 he repeats that people would persecute Christians out of their ignorance of God and of Jesus. And in verse 4 he again says he was telling them this so that they would remember in the future that he’d warned them in advance. Jesus really wanted their faith in him to grow, even in the midst of persecution.

Then he comes back to his main subject, that he was leaving them. Read verses 5,6. The disciples were filled with grief not because they loved Jesus so much but because they were so self-centered. They just didn’t know what they would do without him. So Jesus explained further. Read verse 7. If the disciples kept on depending on the human Jesus, they could not experience the independent faith and remarkable spiritual growth that come from the Advocate, the Holy Spirit. They had to let go of their attachment to the human Jesus so that they could begin depending on the Holy Spirit. Only through the Holy Spirit’s indwelling would they experience deep satisfaction of soul (7:37–39). Only through the Spirit would they also begin to understand the things Jesus said and did, and all the things that had happened to him (2:19–22; 12:12–16; 13:3–7; 20:3–9). We all try to hold onto people who make us feel secure, like a security blanket, but what we really need is to start depending on the Holy Spirit.

Jesus taught what else the Holy Spirit would do. Read verses 8–11. The world seems so powerful and so overwhelming, especially to weak disciples. People in the world seem so stubbornly self-righteous. But the Holy Spirit proves that the world is wrong about sin, righteousness and judgment. What does it mean? The world says there’s no such thing as sin, that people can have their own kind of righteousness, that there won’t be any judgment. But the Holy Spirit convicts people powerfully of their sin of unbelief. The Holy Spirit convicts people powerfully of the truth that only Jesus, who went back to God the Father, is righteous. The Holy Spirit convicts people powerfully that there will definitely be a day of judgment when the devil and all who side with him will be condemned.

Jesus wanted to say so much more to help his disciples, but he knew they wouldn’t be able to bear it right now. Read verse 13a. Jesus relied on the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, to guide his disciples in the future into all the truth. It’s a wonderful promise of God: if we believe in Jesus, the Holy Spirit will guide us into all the truth. The Holy Spirit will give us independent, unwavering, personal faith, and deep conviction, and he will help us remain in Jesus, who is the truth (cf. 14:6; 1Jn2:27). Verse 13b says that the Spirit of truth will also tell us what is yet to come. He reveals to us God’s ultimate victory of Jesus’ second coming and the glorious hope of his eternal kingdom. Look at verses 14,15. People love to draw attention to themselves and glorify themselves. It’s incessant in all kinds of human interactions. But the Spirit’s main work is to draw attention to Jesus and to glorify Jesus (14,15). Spirit-filled Bible teachers need to do the same.

Read 15:26 again. Thank God who promised to give us the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, to testify about Jesus, to know all the truth about Jesus, and to overcome the hatred and persecution of the world and grow in independent faith. May God help each of us to deeply experience the presence of the Holy Spirit and learn to depend on him so that we can live as Jesus’ witnesses.