

3 *Handling Hate*

John 15:12–16:4

Purpose: To explore the personal relationship that Jesus desires to have with us and to prepare us for persecution that comes with following Christ.

While on earth, Jesus did not surround himself with a group of students or even a group of followers. He placed himself in the company of friends. To admit that we need friends is a sign of maturity, not immaturity. Close relationships are Christlike! In this passage Jesus shows us what friendship with him is really like. There's both comfort and cost.

1. In your opinion, what are some of the most important qualities in a friendship?

2. Read John 15:12–17. Jesus' command in verse 12 is, "Love each other as I have loved you." In what specific ways did Jesus demonstrate his love?

In what practical ways can we, like Christ, lay down our lives for our friends?

3. What are the requirements and benefits of friendship with Christ (vv. 14–17)?

4. Is being a friend of Jesus the same as being a believer in Jesus? Explain.

5. Read John 15:18–25. If love is to characterize our relationship with other believers, hate will characterize our relationship with the world. What reasons does Jesus give for the world's hatred?

Question 5. The hostility of the world is the price the believer pays for friendship with Christ. You need to draw the distinction between persecution for Christ's sake or persecution that comes because we do something personally offensive.

6. Read 1 Peter 4:12-14; 2 Tim. 3:12; Philippians 1:29. What do these verses tell us about the prospect of persecution for following Christ?

7. Give one or two specific examples of how you have experienced the world's hatred as a Christian.

How did you respond to the hostility at the time?

8. What does Jesus mean when he says that without his coming, his words and his miracles, the world “would not be guilty of sin” (vv. 22–25)?

9. Read John 15:26–16:4. In what specific ways will the Counselor and the disciples themselves continue the ministry begun by Jesus (vv. 26–27)?

10. What kind of treatment can the disciples expect from those who do not know Christ (16:1–4)?

“The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.”

Some have mistakenly believed that these words can be found in the New Testament. They’re not. In fact, the phrase, itself, is a paraphrase of a statement made by an early church leader called Tertullian in 197 A.D. in a book he entitled The Apology. In it, Tertullian writes to the Roman governor of his province, refuting various false charges being made against Christians and the Christian faith, arguing that the followers of Christ were loyal subjects of the empire, and thus, should not be persecuted. At any rate, Tertullian observes, the persecution was failing to destroy Christianity. He writes, “kill us, torture us, condemn us, grind us to dust; your injustice is the proof that we are innocent. Therefore God suffers (allows) that we thus suffer. When you recently condemned a Christian woman to the leno (pimp, i.e. accused her of being a prostitute) rather than to the leo (lion), you made confession that a taint on our purity is considered among us something more terrible than any punishment and any death. Nor does your cruelty, however exquisite, avail you; it is rather a temptation to us. The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed.”

11. What kinds of persecution are most probable for us in our society? Explain.

Read Romans 12:18 and Romans 13:1-7. How do these verses relate to this topic of persecution?

12. If we as Christians are not persecuted in some way, what might that imply about our spiritual commitment?

According to some studies, an average of 171,000 Christians worldwide are martyred for their faith per year.

The 20th Century may have been the most striking in the annals of Christian martyrdom, and a new book shows it with numbers.

In two millennia of Christian history, about 70 million faithful have given their lives for the faith, and of these, 45.5 million, fully 65%, were in the last century, according to "The New Persecuted," by Italian journalist Antonio Socci.

The countries where the most Christians are dying for their faith are Indonesia, Bangladesh, India, Nigeria, East Timor, Cuba, the former Soviet republics, Saudi Arabia and other Muslim countries, Vietnam, China, and others. The country with the worst persecution of Christians is currently Sudan.

Why not take a few minutes right now and pray for your persecuted brothers and sisters around the world who are risking their lives to follow Christ.

2011 Lee Webb prepared for Salisbury Bible Fellowship. Portions also adapted from *John: The Way to True Life* by Douglas Connelly. Copyright 1990 by Douglas Connelly. Published by InterVarsity Press.
