

Holy War and the Holy Spirit (John 16:1-7)

This week on Fox News the headline was on Christianity being purged from Bible lands this decade. ‘The dwindling Christian population of the Middle East could vanish completely ... say alarmed aid groups who say followers of the Bible are being killed, driven from their land or forced to renounce their faith at an unprecedented pace ... The study includes disturbing data about the plunging numbers of Christians in the part of the world that gave birth to the faith, and makes a dire prediction of what could happen... While Christians are under siege from Islamic State radicals in war-torn Syria and Iraq, the report notes that the religion is being targeted throughout the region. Christians who have managed to escape ISIS have fled to places like Europe and Lebanon, while members of the faith also are under increasing pressure in Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf nations. The Christian population in Iraq has plummeted from 1.5 million in 2003 to current estimates of 275,000 and could be gone for good within five years, according to the report. The dwindling numbers are due to genocide, refugees fleeing to other countries, those who are internally displaced, and others hiding in plain sight and not allowing their faith to be publicly known ... While the situation is most dire in the Middle East, Christianity is under assault in Africa and Asia, too...extremists in Sudan, Kenya, Tanzania and other parts of the continent. Asia's Christians have been targeted by nationalist religious movements--Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist’¹

Some say in the Middle East in the last 10 years 100,000 Christians die each year because they’re Christians. If that’s true, every 5 minutes one is killed.² Non-Christians sources are taking notice, Senators and Congressmen, some candidates are noting it. This month the U.S. Department of State released a report on ‘unimaginable horrors’ Christians are facing around the world.³ It isn’t limited to the Middle East, Africa, or parts of Asia. In Sweden, jihadis living in one town have warned its Christians in writing ‘convert or die.’⁴

That’s all in the last month overseas, last weekend a Fox story in **Nor-Cal**: “Stabber’s Manifesto Included ‘Praise for Allah,’ ... [UC Merced student Faisal Mohammad’s] ‘handwritten manifesto...bore names of his targets, a vow “to cut someone’s head off” and as many as five reminders to “praise Allah,” law enforcement authorities told FoxNews.com.’⁵ A year ago the Washington Post published a letter warning Christianity of coming jihad from Nidal Hassan, a proclaimed ‘soldier of Allah’ who said ‘fighters ...have a greater rank in the eyes of Allah than believers who don’t fight.’⁶

Hassan killed 13 U.S. soldiers in Fort Hood, TX. He considered it part of a jihad, or holy war (convicted of murder, but never charged for terrorism?). From Fox News to the *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* through history, persecution isn't new. Before 9/11/2001 though, jihad was something I knew little about and the more I learned about holy war, the more unsettling it was to realize people among us think killing us serves God. It isn't new, though, we see it more on the news, but it started in NT times. Jesus said in Jn 16:2 *'the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.'*

The *New American Commentary* says the 'expression translated "offering a service to God" [in John 16, v. 2] clearly carries a sense of holy zeal, a jihad (a holy war), or a worshipful commitment on the part of the persecutors.'⁷

On one level those news stories are disturbing and unnerving but on another level they're confirming exactly what Jesus said in John 16. The hour began with Stephen being killed in Jerusalem by men thinking they were serving God by stoning a blasphemer. From then on, the fiercest persecution wasn't generally from non-religious pagans, more often than not, worst opposition came from religious people believing their actions pleased their god. The apostles weren't attacked by non-religious pagans so much as they were by the Jewish religious leaders. Saul of Tarsus believed that as he persecuted Christians to the death, he was serving God (Acts 26:9-12, Gal 1:13-14).

After Saul became Paul the Christian, this was his experience in 2 Cor 11: *'imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes [that's a synagogue penalty by religious Jews]...once I was stoned [again Jewish religious way to kill]...dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles [many of those Gentile religious people, ex: Acts 19]...dangers among false brethren*

The words of Jesus in Jn 16 are true and have continued since He said them. John 16:1–3 *"I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. ² They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. ³ And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me.*

Jesus wants His followers to know when people do those things in the name of God they actually don't know God. Killing Christians in Christ's name is done because they don't know Christ, according to Christ. The deluded may call it holy war but the holy God in heaven they don't know in a saving way

They may think dying in jihad means they'll wake up in paradise but Jesus taught men wake up in hell who die rejecting His lordship and gospel grace. History has seen its crusaders and claimers of Christ in many religions who do the things of v. 2. Christ says in v. 3 they don't know Him or the Father. Religious killing isn't new, but v. 2 predicted when killing *Christians* will be done by people believing that's their service (or literally worship) to God, or gods. In the context of 15:18-25 it's trying to kill followers of Jesus

This is a prophecy about church history and it's been fulfilled to the letter. A Jewish rabbi wrote later when a man kills a heretic, 'it is as though he had offered an offering' (Midrash Rabbah, Numbers 21.3, Sanhedrin 9.6). Just like Jn 16:2 said, the time was coming when those who kill you would think they're giving an *offering* to God (same word). Jewish historian Josephus tells us James the brother of Jesus died at the hands of the Jewish authorities in the 1st century, and the Jews displayed similar religious zeal at the death of John's disciple Polycarp in the 2nd century. Religious Romans executed Christians who would not sacrifice pagan offerings, and they thought killing them was a way to honor their god's offerings, just as Jesus said in Jn 16:2!

MacArthur: 'empire-wide persecution of the church took place under Emperor Decius in A.D. 250...requiring everyone to offer a sacrifice to the gods...Those who refused faced arrest, imprisonment, torture, and execution...[in 303 Diocletian ordered] all Christians offer sacrifices to the Roman gods on pain of death...[Christianity would prevail in the Roman empire and eventually become the official religion but would be corrupted by pagan blending thru the centuries] Under the Roman Catholic Church, which replaced Imperial Rome as the dominant power in the Middle ages, persecution broke out anew... from those who call themselves "Christians." The horrors of the Inquisition, the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, and the martyrdoms of many believers epitomized the Roman Church's effort to suppress the true gospel...it has been estimated by none other than a Roman Catholic source that, in all of church history, roughly 70 million Christians have been killed for their profession of faith...'⁸ Several sources tell us more Christians died for their faith in the 20th century than all the other 19 centuries of church history *combined*. And it's increased in the 21st century.

What does Jesus want us to take away from this in the text? 2 responses

1. Don't fall away

¹ *"I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away.*

The Greek verb translated ‘falling away’ is *skandalizo* (scandalize). KJV: *be not offended*. We might say in modern English ‘don’t freak out!’ Don’t be scandalized and offended when you see the news. But *do* study why He told us these things to keep us from failing scandalously, falling in apostasy. Other translations say Jesus told us this to keep us from stumbling or from going astray. It can be translated ‘cause to sin’ – Jesus tells us all this so we won’t stumble or astray. We’re not to let these things cause us to sin in how we think or speak by being appalled, anxious, or angry sinfully at the sinner

Don’t fall away, pray! Pray like the verse right before says, 15:27, that you can be a faithful witness. Pray for Christians around the world facing great persecution and martyrdom that they will be witnesses. Pray that God will use our witness and theirs to rescue people from false religious zeal. We’re not to be *whiners* about Muslims, we’re not to be *worriers* about things we can’t control in the government. We can be *working*, praying, voting, giving truth to any we have influence with. The priority isn’t to be *worked up* over which businesses don’t say ‘Merry Christmas’; there’s a higher priority in the verse right before this, we’re to be *witnesses*. Jesus tells us this so we’ll not be offended and so our message to the world won’t be how offended we are at them, our message is the good news of Christmas. The message is He came because *our sin* was offensive to God, but He forgives all who repent.

In Mt 26:31 Jesus used this same word fall for the disciples scattering that night in fear and hiding in homes that weekend. We’re not to be wimps, we *are* to be witnesses. Don’t fear, flee, or hide in homes, homeschool huddles or homesteads to avoid being around unbelievers at all costs and all times. How our witness looks may differ from person to person but the application is clearly don’t fall away, pray how you can stand and be Christ’s witnesses. We might think we can avoid v. 2 in America or in the foothills away from the bigger cities of the left coast. But notice v. 2 isn’t just about the extreme religious martyrdom of Christians, the first part of v. 2 includes ostracism or opposition in more general forms, the excluding of Christians from society.

When v. 2 says ‘*they will put you out of synagogues,*’ that meant ‘they’ll put you out of society.’ For 1st century Jews that meant being excluded from the social life of Israel, not to mention religious life (synagogues then were how you worshipped and heard God’s Word as people didn’t own Bibles in their homes). Most of the early Christians weren’t martyred, but they were made to feel like outsiders to their own people group and families. It affected their education and occupations and relations, and it still can today in some cases

When I taught on John 15 and the hatred of Christians by atheists and others one of our ladies called me that week to tell me about her granddaughter in a local middle school who had an atheist classmate verbally harassing her for being a Christian, spewing hateful words about her for her faith, telling others not to be friends with this Christian. I know of brothers here who are no longer in jobs for reasons that seem to me to have centered on their faith in Christ, and I've heard of a young brother whose position may be affected as his Christian conscience can't participate in what he's being asked to do.

Persecution isn't limited to violence, it's also those who want the silence of Christian convictions on marriage and sexuality. In Canada pastors can be prosecuted for saying things I've taught from this pulpit. We're not to whig out or freak out about "what if faithful pastors end up in jail?!" That won't be the end of the church, that will mean the start up of more jail ministries! Where opposition and ostracism grows, Christianity grows. As persecution rises, the pure church rises higher. The gates of hell won't prevail against it. This is spiritual warfare, and we're not to retreat in defeat or run off AWOL

In WWII as some in England were tempted to fall away, Churchill said:⁹ 'never flinch, never weary, never despair...at all costs--Victory in spite of all terror--Victory, however long and hard the road may be... We shall go on to the end...we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air...whatever the cost may be; we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender...we shall not flag or fail'

Don't fall away, v. 1 says. 2nd response: **Don't forget what the Lord said**

⁴ *But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.*

Their hour is the hour of the persecutors of Christians like in v. 2, the hour when religious people would seek to even kill in God's name. Back in 13:1 the upper room discourse began by saying Jesus knew *His hour had come to depart out of the world*, that's the hour of His death. His hour had come to die at religious hands and here He says *their hour* is about to come, too, a time of religious persecution in the book of Acts that continues to this day.

"Ironically "*their hour* would appear to be the time of...greatest victory [for persecutors] but really it would be the time of their greatest defeat...Jesus' "hour" [13:1, death] would appear to be the time of this greatest defeat, but

really it would be the time of His greatest victory. The memory that Jesus had forewarned His disciples would enable them to realize that things were not out of control when they seemed to be. This remembrance [of this in v. 4] would really strengthen their faith in Jesus rather than weakening it.”¹⁰

Another writer adds: ‘Rather than destroy their faith, persecutions thus have the potential of deepening...trust if they remember Jesus’ prediction.’¹¹

Don’t forget what the Lord said about suffering or persecution for His sake. The Lord had spoken through the prophet Isaiah of the days when religious people would persecute believers who honored His Word: *Hear the word of the LORD, you who tremble at his word: “Your brothers who hate you and cast you out for my name’s sake have said, ‘Let the LORD be glorified...” but it is they who shall be put to shame.* (Isa 66:5). Some actually think they are glorifying God in hatefully casting out believers in the name of the Lord but in trying to bring shame to believers, it’s the persecutors who God will put to shame. The Lord said these sort of things in the OT but here the Lord speaks of things He told them in the NT, this night and on other occasions.

Lk 6:22 *Blessed are you when men hate you, And when they exclude you, And revile you, and cast out your name as evil, For the Son of Man’s sake.*
Mt 5:11 *Blessed are you when they...persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.* ¹² *Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven...* [these are the sort of things the Lord said]

Don’t forget what the Lord said about suffering or persecution for His sake. ‘When the Spaniards were conquering South America, Pizarro presented his men with a choice. They might have the wealth of Peru with its dangers, or the comparative poverty of Panama with its safety. He drew a line in the sand with his sword...: “Comrades, on that side are toil, hunger, nakedness, storm, desertion and death; on this side is ease. There lies Peru with its riches; here lies Panama with its poverty. Choose, each man, what best becomes a brave Castilian. For my part, I go...” There was silence and hesitation...then an old pilot and twelve soldiers stepped across to Pizarro’s side. It was with them that the discovery and the conquest of Peru began. Jesus offered, and still offers, not the way of ease, but the way of glory. He wants men who are prepared with open eyes to venture for his name.’¹²

In the end of v. 33 Jesus promises there will be tribulation in the world but He calls us to take heart, because He’s overcome, conquered His conquest.

Don't forget what the Lord said about suffering for His sake, remember the words of v. 4: *But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you. I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you.*⁵ *But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?'*⁶ *But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.*

When Jesus was with them, the disciples weren't persecuted or being killed, so v. 4 explains why Jesus didn't say these things from the beginning of His ministry, because He didn't need to while He was with His disciples. But in v. 5 He tells them He's going back to God who sent Him, He's about to die, and because He's leaving, the disciples' hearts have been filled with sorrow. It was apparently a self-centered sorrow at what it meant to them to lose the Lord, so now none of them ask about His going in genuine concern for Him

If He left it there, the sorrow would have overwhelmed their hearts and this would not be a very encouraging message! But v. 7 says: *'Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.'*

Don't forget what the Lord said about suffering or persecution for His sake, and don't forget what the Lord said about the Spirit (our last application). It is to their advantage that Jesus was going away because only after He goes away will the Helper come, the Holy Spirit He just promised back in 15:26. After He goes to heaven, He will send the Spirit, so it's better that He goes. One translation has *'it is best for you that I go away.'* How is it better, best?

We might think the best thing for us would be Jesus with us bodily, but He says there's something better that His physical presence with us in the flesh: the Spirit of Christ sent to us is more to our advantage. Some people think it would be so much better for my faith if I could see and touch Jesus myself. Jesus says you're more blessed if you don't (20:29). Better to walk by faith than sight. We might say we wish we'd been there in Galilee with Jesus as He walked the earth, or heard Him with our own ears, or seen Him with our own eyes, witnessed His glory in His transfiguration, etc. But Peter said we have a more sure word than even that experience, the Spirit-inspired written Word (1 Pet 1). The only thing better than Jesus on earth is His Spirit in us.

Go back to chapter 14 in context. Jesus said He would leave, v. 16: *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you*

forever,¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells **with you** and will be **in you**.¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

How would Jesus not leave them as orphans and come to them? The Father would send the Spirit of adoption that testifies we're sons that cry out Papa! God sends another helper of the same kind as Christ, not only to be *with* us, but *in* us forever. Jesus was with them 3 years, the Spirit is in us forever.

J.C. Ryle said: 'What we should all desire and long for is not Christ's body literally touched with our hands ... but Christ dwelling spiritually in our hearts by the grace of the Holy [Spirit].' He quotes John Calvin: 'Far more advantageous and far more desirable is that presence of Christ, by which He communicates Himself to us through the grace and power of His Spirit, than if He were present before our eyes.' Alford: 'the Spirit is a more blessed manifestation of God than was ever the bodily presence of the risen Savior.'

Henry: 'the Spirit is more intimately a Comforter than Christ in His fleshly presence; because the Spirit can comfort all believers at once in all places, while Christ's bodily presence [in His days on earth could] comfort but few, and that only in one place at once. The benefit of Christ's presence was great, but the advantage of the Spirit's [work in believers] is much greater'¹³

Pastor J.D. Greear: 'The Spirit inside you is better than Jesus beside you.' He says some '*believe in* the Holy Spirit, but they relate to him the same way they relate to their pituitary gland: grateful it's in there; know it's essential for something; don't pay much attention to it ... Yet Scripture indicates that God has always desired a close and personal presence with his people...through the Holy Spirit, he is closer than ever — God *in* us.'¹⁴

We sang earlier 'O Come, O Come Emmanuel.' Emmanuel came as God *with* us, but after Jesus came and left and the Spirit came, it was God *in* us. Jesus as God with us on earth could only be in one place at a time, but His Spirit that He sends from the Father is in every Christian everywhere at the same time. If He had stayed on earth and didn't go to heaven He couldn't be our High Priest, as Hebrews says, and Jesus wouldn't be seated at the right hand of heaven interceding for His people before the throne of God above. It's better to have Jesus as your advocate in heaven and the Spirit as your advocate in you, your constant counselor, comforter, and your helper 24/7.

In 14:26 the Spirit teaches us and reminds us what Jesus taught and applies it and illuminates it. If you want to see how it's better for Jesus to leave and the Spirit come, just compare the disciples in the gospels: Jesus taught and they didn't get it, but then compare that to the book of Acts after Pentecost.

As the Spirit taught them and helped them remember and really grasp what Jesus taught, you can see how it was better to have the Spirit inside than the Lord physically by their side. Think of Peter who while Jesus was on earth, Peter said and did some foolish and fearful things. But when the Spirit came inside Peter he was a fearless witness and spoke great wisdom in Acts 15.

Think of John, writer of this gospel of John, who in his pride asked Jesus if he could be on the left or right side in the kingdom with his brother James but the Spirit humbled John from the inside out to a selfless self-sacrificing servant-leader of love. Better than Jesus beside me is His Spirit inside me.

In 15:26-27 the Spirit bears witness of Jesus and helps us be witnesses, like Jesus said in the Great Commission: '*go and make disciples...and I am with you always.*' He wouldn't physically be with them always but His Spirit is with and in all believers always. He told them to wait to be witnesses till He sent the Spirit; they couldn't fulfill that task with Jesus still on earth and the Spirit not sent from the Father. Only by the Spirit can we fulfill our mission.

Our closing song celebrates things we should celebrate, praise the Spirit for:

[You] bring the presence of the risen Lord to renew my heart and make me whole

[You] cause your Word to come alive in me, give me faith for what I cannot see ...

[You] abide within... Your joy [the fruit of the Spirit] seen in all I do—

[fruit of Spirit is] Love enough to cover every sin, in each thought and deed and attitude

...Lead us on the road of sacrifice, that in unity the face of Christ

will be clear for all the world to see¹⁵

¹ <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2015/11/09/on-brink-christianity-facing-middle-east-purge-within-decade-says-group/>

² <http://www.wnd.com/2014/10/isis-document-ids-christians-as-enemy-no-1/>

³ <http://www.christianpost.com/news/isis-christian-persecution-religious-freedom-report-us-state-department-149173/>

⁴ <http://www.express.co.uk/news/world/612425/Islamic-State-ISIS-Assyrian-Christians-caliphate-Gothenburg-Sweden-jihadis>

⁵ <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2015/11/07/campus-stabber-manifesto-included-praise-for-allah-plan-for-beheading/>

⁶ <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2014/10/09/fort-hood-shooter-sends-letter-to-pope-francis-espousing-jihad.html>

⁷ Gerald L. Borchert, *John 12–21*, vol. 25B, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 161.

⁸ John MacArthur, *John 12-21*, p. 170.

⁹ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/winston-churchill/11366880/Winston-Churchills-10-most-important-speeches.html>

¹⁰ Tom Constable, *Expository Notes on the Bible*, 16:4.

¹¹ Andreas Kostenberger, *John*, p. 469.

¹² William Barclay, ed., *The Gospel of John*, vol. 2, The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1975), 191.

¹³ J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospel*, vol. 4, p. 137, 137-38.

¹⁴ <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-s-better-than-jesus-beside-you>

¹⁵ “Holy Spirit,” Keith Getty and Stuart Townend.