

The Cost of Christlikeness*John 15:18-16:4*

Introduction: When it comes to opposition or even persecution, our experience varies a lot. Some of us have faced little, while others may have paid a high price for following Christ. Certainly this is true when we think of our brothers and sister in Christ around the world. Whatever our individual experiences, it is good for us to hear what Jesus says in this passage. We need to know that God doesn't guarantee that our lives will be free from opposition and persecution. In fact, it would be strange if we never experienced such things. And so since opposition/persecution for our faith is possible, we need to be prepared to face it.

Opening Discussion: Have you ever felt that you were facing opposition or being treated differently because you were a Christian? If so, how?

Read John 15:18-16:4

1. What sticks out to you from this passage?
2. What is the "world" that Jesus talks about here?
3. How does Jesus describe the disciples' relationship to the world?
4. What expectations does this passage set about life in this world for a follower of Christ?

Steve said:

Just like Jesus' original disciples, we should expect people to treat us the same way they treated Jesus. We need this perspective for at least a couple of reasons. First, we need this perspective so that we won't be shocked and dismayed when opposition comes. Sooner or later, whether subtly or blatantly, we will experience opposition for our faith in Jesus. When it happens, we shouldn't be surprised. Paul actually desired this experience of identifying so fully with Jesus that he suffered as Jesus suffered. He called it in Philippians 3 "the fellowship of His sufferings."

5. Is it part of your expectation of the Christian life that you will be treated like Jesus? Do you expect opposition at times? Why or why not?

Steve said:

In light of what Jesus taught in this passage, when opposition comes, we need to respond with love. As we've often noticed, Peter's normal response to opposition was to fight back - as when he cut off the ear of the servant who came to arrest Jesus. But years later after Peter had matured spiritually, he advocated "not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead" (1 Peter 3:9). When "the world" hates you for your allegiance to Jesus, the last thing you want to do is to become worldly and hate them in return. We can prepare ourselves for opposition ahead of time by training ourselves to be gracious to people day-in and day-out. As they say, "You don't begin weaving your parachute after you've jumped out of the plane." If you aren't gracious and forgiving in everyday relationships, it's highly unlikely you'll be gracious when someone insults you because of your faith. This week notice how you respond to people who inconvenience you or who rub you the wrong way; you'll see how you need to train yourself to respond well to opposition/persecution.

6. In the past, if you've faced opposition for your faith, has your normal response been to fight back or to give a blessing in return?

7. Can you think of any everyday situations right now that might make for good training opportunities to be gracious to people who rub you the wrong way?

8. What role will the Holy Spirit have in the face of opposition/persecution (see also Matt 10:19-20; Acts 5:32)?

9. What is the main thing that you sense God is saying to you through this passage?