

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 2/6/94  
John 15:18-22 "The Cost of Being a Fruitful Christian"

**Communion:** We've been learning about Abiding in Christ, from Jn 15. Jesus said, "Abide in Me, and I in you." He gave us a visible reminder of this intimacy when He instituted the ordinance of Communion.

**Intro:** There's a cost involved in being a fruitful Christian. There is not a cost in BECOMING a Christian (Jesus paid that price--salvation is by grace alone). But there is a cost in BEING a Christian.

Illust:

Q: What does it cost to be a fruitful Christian?  
Jesus talks about the cost in John 15:18-22.

Review:

Jn 15 is about fruitfulness. Fruitfulness is linked to abiding in Christ (5), to experiencing intimacy with Christ, to being a friend of Christ.

Last week, we learned the mind-boggling truth that as followers of Jesus, Jesus calls us His friends. What a privilege! Yet friendship with Jesus is carefully qualified by our Lord in vv 14-17. Being a friend of Jesus involves 3 traits: First, Obedience (14). Second, Knowledge (15-16, as friends, we're privileged to know about a special position, purpose, and plan). And third, Love (17).

Why do well-meaning Christians get bad press releases? It's happening, isn't it? Let me ask you. If we experience opposition, hostility, even hatred from the world, does it mean we've done something wrong?

Quote: D.A. Carson (114), "Even to ask such questions..."

Listen to Jesus's words. READ: John 15:18-22

In Jn 15, Jesus is preparing His followers for His departure. He wants them to know how to live for Him when He is not physically present with them. He doesn't gloss over the painful part, either. He speaks candidly to them that friendship with Him involves cost. They will pay a price. They will face Opposition.

Q: What should be our attitude as Christians towards Opposition?

**Proposition: In John 15:18-22, there are two steps we must take in light of opposition.**

I. Expect it.

A. Who? Who opposes Christian? (18)

B. Why? Why are we opposed? (18-22)

1. We are opposed because of Our Involvement with one another (17).
2. We are opposed because of Our Identification with Christ (18-20).
3. We are opposed because of Our Intimacy with God (21).
4. We are opposed because of Our Integrity (22).

II. Endure it (22).

## I. Expect it.

V 18 "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you."

### A. Who? Who opposes Christian? (18)

If the WORLD. Who is the world? The term is used in Scripture in at least 3 different ways (Wiersbe, 359). It can mean the created world (Jn 1:10--mountains, rivers, plantlife). It can mean the world of humanity (Jn 3:16 "For God so loved the world..."). It can also refer to society apart from and opposed to God.

That's what Jesus has in mind here in v 18. The world system. It's a system that's in rebellion against God, like society in the day of the tower of Babel. It's a system that's under the control of the Evil one (see Jn 14:30 "the prince of this world cometh...").

The world is made up of people who have never acknowledged the Lordship of Jesus Christ. They are absorbed either with themselves, or with their self-created gods (Carson, 116).

The world opposes Christians.

Illust:

### B. Why? Why are we opposed? (18-22)

That's a valid question. Even from a human perspective, you would think that the world would applaud Christianity--with emphasis on doing good. But it doesn't. Why not? Jesus highlights 4 reasons here. The first actually goes back to v 17.

#### *1. We are opposed because of Our Involvement with one another (17).*

V 17 "These things I command you, that ye love one another."

There's something beautiful about the Christian community. Following our Lord's command, we love each other. We care for each other. We get involved in each others lives. That's a beautiful thing.

But it's also a very disturbing thing, to the world. Notice the contrast between vv 17-18. Right after Jesus commanded us to love one another, He revealed that the world would hate us. Why is that?

Because our love for each other exposes their selfishness. In the world, it's every man for himself. Take care of your own hide. Live like an island. And people seem to be doing pretty well too, until someone comes along who models true love.

You see, when we exhibit true love, it's like a spotlight that reveals the self-centered wrinkles of the lost. And they hate it. And hate us.

Illust: The story of Corrie Tenboom is a case in point. Hitler told his people, "You are the Masterrace. You have a right to get rid of annoying "sub-humans" like the Jews. Think of yourself, and get rid of them." And thousands bought his propoganda. But a few, like Corrie and her family, said, "No, God calls us not to think of ourselves, but others. We choose to get involved helping others, namely the Jews." And because of that, they were hated! There love irritated the establishment!

By the way, that's a basic reason why the world today attacks anyone who speaks out against abortion. Our secular culture says, "A woman has the right to do

whatever she wants with that lump of tissue in her body. It's her right." And when they see a group of people getting involved defending the needs of helpless victims, they hate it. They hate us. Because our involvement reveals their selfishness.

There's another, more fundamental reason the world opposes us.

2. *We are opposed because of Our Identification with Christ (18-20).*

V 18 "If the world hates...it hated ME..."

When John wrote this gospel, the world's hatred of Christians was a real problem. In the latter part of the first century, the Roman government hated Christians. Christians were looked down on as "disloyal citizens" of the Empire (Barclay, 182). Do you know why?

Oh yes, the Romans were very tolerant of different religions. As long as you were loyal to the system. As long as you burned a pinch of incense, and said, "Caesar is Lord," then you could go and worship any god you liked.

That's exactly why Christians were considered "disloyal." A Christian calls no man Lord except Jesus Christ.

The world hates us because it first hated Jesus Christ. V 18 lit. reads, "Me before you it hated." How the world hated Jesus! And for no good reason! He healed them. He taught them the truth. He loved them. He offered them life. And they killed Him.

Listen. The world hated Jesus from His birth (when Herod the Great tried to kill him) to His death (when they made a mockery of Him, and nailed Him to the cross). Why should we expect less?

Here's why the world hates us. Because of our Involvement with one another. And because of our Identification with Jesus Christ.

There is a way to avoid conflict with the world. Do you know what it is? V 19 "If ye were of the world, the world would love its own." Be like the world. Conform to its mold (live a "politically correct" life). That's a sure way to avoid its animosity.

But that's not an option for the Christian. Why not? Because our identification is with Christ, not the world. V 19b "because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."

You see, the world loves its own. But it hates one who is different.

And we are different. We have a different love. We have a different direction in life. We have a different Master. We have a different allegiance. We're under different marching orders.

V 20 "Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater..."

Jesus is referring to Jn 13:16. He reminds us that we belong to Him. And to put it bluntly, to belong to Christ means that we're going to share in the hatred directed at Him. It's not so much that the world hates US. It's that it hates HIM. And we're identified with Him.

Yes, the world prides itself in being "tolerant" and "open-minded." But the conditions of tolerance are high. "Conform, and we'll accept you! Be like us, and we'll give you good press releases."

Caution: Some take this verse, and use it to excuse obnoxious, down right rude behavior. I remember one summer when I worked at the Honda factory at Marysville. One of the guys on the sub-assembly line was disliked by most. He was a Christian, and he wanted everybody to know it. I don't doubt his sincerity. He drove 30 miles to church. He carried his Bible to work, and read during breaks. That wasn't the problem. But what really irritated the unsaved was the way he flaunted his opinions as if they were the gospel truth (about his beliefs and practices). I watched the way people rejected him. He could have thought, "Well, I'm suffering for Jesus." I'm not sure it was his identification with Jesus that offended people. HE offended them.

Jesus' words in Jn 15 are not an excuse for us to be obnoxious.

But, the American church is facing an even greater problem.

Illust: Did you read the story in this week's newspaper (Times, 2/1/94) entitled, "Church speeds up services, cuts sermon." "There is no chance of falling asleep during the sermon at the First...Church (in New Jersey)..."

Application: We have a problem when we try to make the church palatable to the world. When we try to make the world like us, and approve of us.

It seems to me that much of the modern church growth movement borders on this. The technique is simple. Do a survey and find out what unsaved people want in a church. Then give it to them. Do they want musical entertainment? Fine. Self-help groups? No problem. Programs for their kids.

Don't misunderstand me. There's nothing wrong with meeting needs. But we must never forget that the gospel is offensive. If we try to make it not so, we dilute the gospel in the process.

Bill Hull warns, "Avant-garde church planters, those on the cutting edge, have begun to till new ground on environment--sadly, it is the wrong ground. They advocate psychographs and building the message around felt need. Demographics design the worship service, and they focus music and other characteristics around the congregations likes and dislikes. Use drama, special effects, and whatever can be found that will hold the congregations interest, these church planters advise. Make church fun and exciting." (71)

There's nothing wrong with trying new things. Yet we must be careful. I read about John Wesley, the great 18th century preacher, this week. He measured his sermons by two standards (Hull, Disc. Church, 95): "Were people converted, and was anyone angered?"

Jesus told us long ago, "I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world will hate you." We are opposed because of our Identification. There's a third reason.

### *3. We are opposed because of Our Intimacy with God (21).*

V 21 "But all these things..."

Notice again, the world hates Christians, FOR JESUS' SAKE. Now follow this. The reason the world opposes us is because it opposed Jesus. And what was the reason Jesus said it opposed Him? v 21 "because they know not Him that sent Me."

Oh, that really irritated the Jews when Jesus insinuated, and even told them bluntly, that they didn't know God! Remember Jn 8? Jesus told the Jews (my paraphrase of 8:55), "You don't know the Father, but I do." Remember how they responded? They tried to stone Him!

The world doesn't care if a man claims to offer A way to God. But it lashes out against anyone who claims to have THE way to God. And that's what Jesus claimed.

We enjoy intimacy with God through His Son. We know God. Does the world know God? No. Anyone who claims to know God, but won't bow the knee to Christ, is ignorant of God. And our intimacy stands in stark contrast with their ignorance.

Key: It's impossible to be a "people-pleaser" and a "God-pleaser" at the same time. James said, "Friendship with the world is enmity against God."

We can't avoid criticism. Someone will criticize us. The question is who do you want pointing the finger at you--people or God?

Listen. If you think that if you resolve to please God, and and you always do what's right towards others, that if you always keep the Golden rule, everyone will LIKE you, let me remind you something. The world hated the one who personified the Golden rule!

You say, "Why does the world hate Jesus?" We'll see in v 22. Why does the world oppose us? Because of our Involvement, our Identification, our Intimacy...

#### *4. We are opposed because of Our Integrity (22).*

You say, "Why does our integrity irritate the world?" Simply put--integrity exposes iniquity. Listen to what Jesus said...

V 22 "If I had not come...but now they have no cloak for their sin."

Jesus isn't saying that before He came, people were innocent. Read the OT, and it's obvious that the world was depraved before His arrival. But when He came, He took away their "cloak" for sin. Their excuse, their pretense.

Illust: It's like the straight "A" student. Quite often, classmates pound the exceptional student with labels like, "Teacher's pet!" "Goody-too-shoes!" Why are they so merciless? Because he makes them feel uncomfortable. Why? Because he reminds them that there's a high standard. And they haven't met it.

That's why the world hated Jesus. He broke the curve on the grading scale. He exposed them. They hated Him for His integrity. That's why the world hates us too.

You see, when your iniquity is exposed, you have a choice. Either change, or try to eliminate the source of the exposure!

The world hates Christians for this very reason--Our Integrity. Some of you have been persecuted at work because you refused to cheat a customer. I read about a

Christian police officer who was not promoted for years because he refused to participate in his commanding officer's addiction to alcohol.

I remember U.S. History class when I was a Jr. in H.S. We sat, not at desks, but at tables. And when we took a test, the cheating was incredible. Students would pool their answers. The teacher didn't seem to care. It was kind of a joke. Until you didn't participate. Until you said, "I don't want you to share your answers with me, nor will I share with you. That's cheating." Integrity ruffles feathers.

Tran: What's our attitude to be towards Opposition from the world? First, expect it. The reason for it are clear. The world opposes us because of our Involvement with one another, because of our Identification with Christ, because of our Intimacy with the Father, and because of our Integrity. Expect it.

Is there anything else we must do? Yes...

## **II. Endure it (22).**

This responsibility is implied, yet clear.

V 22 "Remember the word that I said unto you..."

After awhile, we may get a little weary of the opposition. We may look for a way out, a way to turn down the heat. And there is a way out. We could stop the opposition by watering down the 4 distinctives that are so offensive to the world.

We could tone down our Involvement with one another. We could stop making our Identification with Christ our priority in life. We could do the same with Intimacy with God, and Integrity. And if we did this, the world would applaud us, even accept us.

But Jesus says, "Remember the word that I said unto you." The tense of the word "remember" means that "remembering" is something we are to do continually and constantly. Jesus says, "Remember who you are--my servants. Remember who I am--your Lord. Remember what I've told you--my words. And remember this. These ARE non-negotiables."

We ARE a distinct people. We are called to endure, just as Jesus did.

You say, "I can't. I'm not strong enough." That's right. None of us can, on our own. It all goes back to v 5, doesn't it? "I am the vine, ye are the branches...without me you can do nothing." Christ is our strength.

## **Conclusion:**

Are you experiencing opposition from the world? Paul wrote, "All they who will live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution (II Tim 3:12)." I'm not talking about going around looking for trouble. Yet Jesus said that if we followed Him, the world would hate us.

Beloved, don't lose heart. Expect opposition. And endure opposition, by His strength. It will be worth it all, when we see Jesus.