

The Cost of Discipleship

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John: The Jesus I Never Knew Series

John 15:18-16:4

Right before the 2nd World War, a young German Pastor named Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a hugely important book entitled The Cost of Discipleship. He wrote this book at a time when Nazis had virtually taken over the entire German Church and required conformity to Nazi doctrine from German Protestants and Catholic pulpits.

German pastors were not permitted to protest the growing persecution of the Jews on pain of being imprisoned. The Old Testament wasn't permitted to be taught because it was a Jewish book. Nazi racial theory and the superiority of the Aryan race needed to be continually upheld in the churches and so on.

In the midst of this takeover of the church, a 31 year old pastor named Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote these words, "The cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise God-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die."

You know, from the beginning of the little movement that Jesus started back in the 1st Century, Jesus communicated over and over that becoming one of His followers came with a price tag. It doesn't mean that anyone at any time has ever earned

salvation. Salvation from God is always an utterly free gift of grace given to everyone who is willing to receive it through trust in Christ.

As Bonhoeffer says so eloquently in his book, “God’s grace is free but it doesn’t come cheaply.” You know, virtually everyday you probably receive in the mail a free offer of some kind or other. You’ll get 10,000 free bonus miles from an airline absolutely free. Or you’re offered a check for \$25.00 from MCI absolutely free. Or a gym bag from Sports Illustrated and the card is marked “Free – Free – Free”. But in fine print, with all of these “absolutely free” offers, read above the check deposit line “by cashing this check you are agreeing to sign up for MCI’s elite long distance service for 1 year and the minimum monthly charges are \$35.50”. Or by ordering this gym bag you are agreeing to 3 years of Sports Illustrated.

In the same way Jesus regularly warns anyone who is considering receiving the free gift of salvation, there is some print I want to call your attention to. If you sign up for a relationship with me, Jesus says ... if you sign up to receive the gift of salvation with me, understand that it will cost you. It may cost you family relationships with your parents or siblings – even with your spouse or children. It may cost you professionally. Your relationship with Jesus may impede your career advancement. If you become a follower of mine, Jesus says, it may cost you the respect and esteem of powerful people who shape public opinion and have control over your financial future.

Jesus regularly says if you want to follow Me, understand that you are giving up your claim on all the things that make for happiness in this world ... houses, friendship, security, marriage prospects, sexual liberty ... even your very life. Or I may choose, the Lord tells us, to let you have some of this stuff but I want to call your attention to the fine print: when you sign up for the gift of salvation – and it's free – you are signing over your whole life, all that you possess, all of your rights, all of your dreams, all of your claims on happiness, all the ways you demand that the world should work. With a stroke of your pen you are turning everything over to Me, Jesus Christ, if you want to be My follower. Are you sure you want to do this?

I believe that so much of the shakeout that we see following someone's supposed conversion to Christ is the shock that the person experiences when they discover there is, in fact, fine print in the contract.

"Wait a minute. I didn't know there was any fine print. I didn't know there was any cost associated with accepting the free gift of salvation. I never agreed to limit my dating relationships only to devoted Christians. I didn't read that in the contract."

"You know how much restricting your dating relationships only to devoted Christians cuts down the field of eligibility? Have you actually met some of those single Christians out there? Do you understand how good looking this woman is in my class or this guy is who I'm working with. Now you tell me I'm not allowed to date?" "Hold on there," a student adds, "I never agreed to get a lower grade in a class because a

professor demands that we all accept his worldview. Now you tell me, as a follower of Jesus Christ, I've got to be willing to receive a lower grade?"

"Just a second," a business man says. "You mean I've got to give up my right to sue another Christian for money he legitimately owes me just because he's a fellow believer in Christ? I have a right to that money." "Listen," a married person adds, "Are you telling me that when I came forward to accept Christ I was giving up my right to leave my marriage – even if I became really unhappy ... and we don't get along ... and we fight all the time. I didn't know that was in the fine print."

A Pakistani yells from across the room, "Just a second. You mean if I let it be known in my community that I have secretly received Christ, I will probably be disowned by my father. I might be beaten by my brothers? And there is a possibility that the village elders will kill me?"

I believe that so much of the washout that we see in Christianity – people starting off excited about following Christ but then in a few months or a year later turning their backs on Christ – is due to our failure to read and to call each other's attention to the fine print. The cost associated with receiving Christ and declaring yourself to be His follower.

Of course, in America, we believe by virtue of us being Americans we can change the terms of the contract. We can cross out some of the fine print. We can lower the cost. "Hey Jesus, this pain and suffering and cost and deprivation and carrying this

cross stuff – maybe back in the Middle Ages. After all, they didn't have anything anyway. You know, they were at the bottom rung of the ladder, so calling them to fall off couldn't have hurt that much anyway."

"Maybe all of this fine print about being unfairly attacked and rejected, experiencing lots of shame, losing your business ...Maybe this stuff sells in the 3rd world. I'm not used to suffering, you know. All those floods, famines ... Jesus, may we remind you that we are 21st Century Americans and we are guaranteed, by our Declaration of Independence, Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness? Jesus, we certainly do want to receive Your offer of a free gift of forgiveness and salvation, but we would like to renegotiate the terms of Your offer."

"Instead of suffering, we would like to use a substitute term. What do You think about success? Instead of pain, how about if we change that to prosperity? And in place of a cross, we suggest a crown."

I'm only being slightly tongue-in-cheek here. It is not the case that we believe in America that we can renegotiate the hard terms of followership of Christ. Somehow hard terms don't apply to us.

Where do we read about the cost of discipleship in the New Testament? I would suggest we read about it in every book. For example, in Matthew 16:24 Jesus says, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for

me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus says, "If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels." (Mark 8:38)

In the Gospel of Luke, "Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law." (Luke 12:51-53)

We'll read what Jesus says in the Gospel of John, in the books of Acts the Apostle Paul says, "We must go through many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God. (Acts 14:22)

In the book of Romans, Paul again writes, "If we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory. (Romans 8:17)

I want to show you one other verse from Paul's writings, "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. (2 Timothy 3:12)

We find this message of suffering in the book of James, in the book of Hebrews, in the book of Revelation. One last verse, in the writings of the Apostle Peter

“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed. ... So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.” (1 Peter 4:12,13,19)

There is a cost to following Christ. There is fine print in the contract. I’m going to talk about that today in a talk that I’ve titled “The Cost of Discipleship.” Let’s pray.

Here’s what we read in the Gospel of John 15:18-25:

“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates me hates my Father as well. If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now

they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: ‘They hated me without reason.’” (John 15:18-25)

Jesus tells us in verse 18 that if the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belong to the world it would love you as its own as it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That’s why the world hates you.

It’s important that you understand that the apostle John approaches the word “world” in his gospel in three different ways.

First of all – the word world may simply refer to the earth, the created order. John says that the world was made through Christ in John chapter 1.

Sometimes when John speaks of the world, he’s simply talking about the world of people ... various races and ethnicities – the world of men and women. So he writes in John 3:16, For God so loved the world.” God loves the world of men and women ... the old song, “red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight, Jesus loves the little children of the world.”

But here, in John 15, Jesus says, “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first,” is a third meaning of the word “world.” We’re talking about the mind-set of unredeemed, unsaved humanity. By the world hating you, we’re talking about the

mind-set of people who live in opposition to God, who refuse to receive the truth, to worship God, to believe in Christ or to follow and submit to God's commandments.

David Wells, a theologian put it this way, "The world is the way in which our collective life in our society, and the culture that goes with, it is organized around the self instead of around God. It is life characterized by self righteousness, self centeredness, self satisfaction, self aggrandizement and self promotion, with a corresponding distaste for the self denial proper to union with Christ.

The world, in other words, is a life that is lived in hostility to God and all that God stands for.

Why does Jesus say part of the cost of being a disciple is that you are going to be hated by the world?

First of all, it is a sociological reality. Jesus says if you belong to the world it would love you as its own. As it is, you don't belong to the world. But I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

When a person gets attached to Jesus by receiving the gift of salvation and becoming one of His followers, that person switches their allegiances and loyalties. They join the other side, as it were. They become part of another alien group – a foreigner in their former country. Instead of living as a rebel against the King, the disciple switches sides and joins up with the King's army.

Now it is a sociological fact of life that people prefer those who are like them – we get along best with those who share our value system, who look like us, who sound like us and share our sense of humor, who have similar upbringings to us. Human beings are amazingly tribal and all over the world we find people being hostile to those who are different from them.

In the former Yugoslavia, the Croats historically hated the Serbs, and the Serbs hated the Bosnian Muslims. In Sri Lanka the Tamils thwarted the Sinhalese, and the Sinhalese slaughtered the Tamils. In Africa in the nation of Rwanda, the Hutus slaughter the Tutsis. You see this tribalism all over the world.

I've had the opportunity to travel to many different nations and find that ethnic jokes differ wherever you go. The Swedes tell jokes about the Norwegians; the Scots tell jokes about the English; the Dutch tell jokes about the Germans. There is a sociological reality that happens when you become a Christian.

Suddenly, in the unredeemed world around you, you have different values – different loyalties, different tastes, different perspectives. You are a foreigner wherever you go. It's no wonder that because of your difference you encounter hostility. Have you ever experienced this? That because you are a follower of Christ, you just didn't fit in – at school, at your job, on a team, in your dorm? It's hardest when you are a foreigner in your own family. But the hostility goes deeper than simply being a sociological reality, it is a theological necessity.

Jesus says in verse 20 & 21, “Remember the words I spoke to you, ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obey my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me.”

The ultimate issue regarding hostility is not who we are, but who He is. The world hates whatever belongs to God. Consider how the world has treated the Jewish people – God’s chosen. Consider how God’s servants have been treated throughout history.

Jesus says, regarding his followers, the particular reason why you encounter hostility is because of My name. Verse 21: “They will treat you this way because of my name.” As one writer put it, “in the gorgeous mosaic of diversity, which people celebrate in America, in most public forums the ABC rule is fully in effect. What is the ABC rule that governs most public forums? Anything But Christ.”

You can be into anything in the public schools, on television, in movies, as a government official, and it’s OK. You can chant, burn incense, meditate, declare yourself to have a certain kinds of non-mainstream sexual practices ... it is all accepted so long as we observe the ABC rule – Anything But Christ.

There has been a firestorm of upset whenever a minister prays in the name of Jesus at some State sponsored function like the inauguration of a President, or following a

national tragedy like 9/11. How dare he be so exclusive as to mention the name of Christ? Jesus says the hostility you experience from the world is specifically connected with people's hostility to Christ. And it is an irrational hostility.

“If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates me hates my Father as well. If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: ‘They hated me without reason.’” (John 15:22-25)

Jesus is quoting from Psalm 69 – a Psalm of David. Just as King David was hated and attacked and maligned without reason, so the Son of David – the Davidic King, the Messiah - was hated without reason, and so will those who are attached to David's greatest descendent, Jesus Christ. So will they be hated without reason. Often we Christians shake our heads and ask, “Why am I experiencing so much hostility from my family? I thought they would be happy for me! I finally straighten out my life and am really happy now that I know Jesus. I thought my parents would be happy that I'm no longer doing the things I used to do. I've given up using drugs.”

“I thought my husband would be happy. I'm more loving; I'm more patient. I thought people at work would be happy for me. After all, they've been my friends. Why am I experiencing so much hostility?”

Jesus says the hostility is irrational. There is no ultimate “Why?” It’s not that you’re doing something wrong. In fact, often, the more you do good, the more hostile the reaction will be!

William Barkley, the famous Bible commentator, once said, “It is dangerous to have and to practice a higher standard than the standard of the world.”

Have you ever encountered hostility because you worked too hard or you were too honest? I remember back in college working with some guys in a union shop. I used to work maintenance for years, fabricating sheet metal ducts and doing roofing. I used to have these guys I worked with yelling at me all day, “Slow down; you’re making us look bad. Sit down. Stop working so hard.”

Have you ever been criticized because your standard is higher than the standard of those around you? “Oh look at you, miss goody two shoes. Oh, she won’t do that, she’s a virgin.”

You have never attempted to rub your standard in anyone’s face? You have never come off as self-righteous? Jesus says the hostility is irrational. They hated Me without reason. Irrational hostility from the world is part of the cost of discipleship. Every one of the 12 apostles suffered greatly because of their attachment to Christ.

James, the son of Zebedee, and the brother of John, was the first apostle to die for the Christian faith. He was put to death by the sword in Jerusalem by King Herod

Agrippa. The Lord's brother, James, of the Jerusalem Council and sometimes called James the Righteous, was clubbed to death in the Jewish Temple.

Church tradition tells us that Bartholomew was hacked into pieces while he was still alive. Tradition tells us that Peter was crucified upside down in Rome. The apostle Paul was beheaded on the 3rd milestone of the Appian Way. I visited the spot where he was supposed to have been beheaded.

Thomas, according to church tradition, was run through by a spear in India where he was bearing witness. The apostle John, who wrote the Gospel of John, was imprisoned.

Hostility resulting in physical persecution was the experience of Disciples of Christ for three centuries following Christ's death. It was considered part of the cost. There's a famous story that comes to us out of the early church involving a woman named Perpetua. She was a young married woman of 22 who lived in North Africa in the city of Carthage and recently had given birth to a baby boy.

Perpetua was arrested along with some other North African converts in the year 203. The Roman Emperor forbid fresh conversions to Christianity. And anyone who converted to Christ was liable for the death penalty. It is a wonderful account of the martyrdom of Perpetua and another pregnant slave name Felicitas.

Perpetua's father visited her in jail and begged her to renounce her faith in Christ.

We read in the account:

He came to her and said, "Have pity, my daughter, on my gray hairs. Have pity on your father. If I am worthy to be called a father by you, if I by these hands have brought you to this flower of age, if I have preferred you to all your brothers, do not deliver me up to the scorn of men. Have regard to your brothers, have regard to your mother and your aunt, have regard to your son, who will not be able to live after you are killed. Please, my daughter, lay aside your courage and do not bring us all to destruction," She said, "These things said my father in his affection, kissing my hands, throwing himself at my feet and with tears called not daughter, but lady. And I grieved over the gray hairs of my father that he alone, of all my family, would not rejoice over my death. And I comforted him, saying, on that scaffold, father, whatever God wills shall happen.

On another day my father came to me with my baby boy. He held my baby out to me and said, "Have pity on your baby. Spare the gray hairs of your father; spare the infancy of your baby boy. Offer sacrifices, please, for the well being of the Emperor." But I replied, "I will not do so." I was asked, "Are you a Christian?" and I replied, "I am a Christian." And so I was beaten with rods.

My father, worn out with suffering, came to me again and began to tear out his beard and threw himself on the ground. He uttered such words as might move all of creation. I grieved for his unhappy old age.

And then we read the account of Perpetua and pregnant Felicitas along with other Christian women being lead out into a stadium where people cheered as they had their clothes torn from them and they were gored to death by wild animals.

Jesus is speaking literally when he says, “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.” Hostility to Christians, of course, did not end with the early church.

Around the world today, people in dozen of nations, literally, risk their lives when they openly declare themselves to be followers of Jesus Christ.

In the Sudan, after 40 years of Civil War, the predominately Christian population in the south is subject to torture, to rape, to starvation for the refusal to convert to Islam. Christian children are routinely sold into slavery. In 1983 the Sudan was declared an Islamic Republic. At that time Islamic Sharia Law was imposed on all of the country’s citizens. Since that time hundreds of Christians pastors have been killed. Christian churches have been burned. A report was filed in 1988 that you can read about in Missions Frontiers magazine. Two Muslim professors write about a slaughter of 1000 Christian Dinka men, women and children who were slaughtered and burned to death in a town in the Sudan.

The massacre erupted when 25 Christian Dinka worshipers were driven from their evening prayer service by a mob of Muslims wielding sticks, spears, axes, and soviet made Kalashnikov rifles. The next morning, as many Dinkas were being loaded into

rail box cars for safe evacuation from the troubled town. Hundreds of armed Muslims converged on the train station and began attacking the defenseless Dinkas.

Burning mattresses were heaped on top of the huddled Dinkas. Others were shot, mutilated, or clubbed to death. By nightfall these Muslim professors write, “More than 1,000 Christian Dinkas were dead.”

This atrocity happened in this world at our time in history. More Christians have been killed in the Sudan than all of the people killed in Rwanda, Bosnia and Kosovo put together. Christians are being slaughtered and Churches are being burned in Indonesia. There was a horrible slaughter of Christian children in a Pakistani church bombing just a couple of years ago.

If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you.

You know the hostility of the world towards Christians takes a different shape at different times in history and among different nations. At the same time, the hostility can be overt and violent as it has been at many times in Christian history. We have seen in our own country outbreaks of violence against black and white Christians in the south during the 1950s and 60s.

But in contemporary America, the hostility is generally not overtly violent. And so, sometimes we believe that the fine print in the contract about hostility from the world doesn't apply to us in our day and in our lives. We don't live in Pakistan or in the

Sudan or in Indonesia. We were not blacks living in the South in the 1950s. Perhaps we can escape hostility from the world.

Brothers and sisters, every disciple will pay a price and it is incumbent upon every follower of Christ to discern the form that the world takes in their country and in their time in history, in their lives. There is a call upon us to discern, interpret the signs of the time. Can we see where the world – the mindset of unredeemed humanity – impacts us? I've listed on your outline 5 areas where Christians living in 21st Century are likely to encounter hostility from the world.

Certainly we find hostility in the area of sexuality and the maintenance of Biblical sexual standards. There's a very good man named Andy Comiskey. Andy is a former practicing homosexual who has been healed by the power of Jesus Christ and His cross. He has been married to his wife for about 2 decades and has several children. He leads a ministry called "Desert Streams" which offers the hope of healing and redemption for those men and women who want to break free from homosexual bondage.

Recently Andy met with a well known Christian author who advocates for committed homosexual marriages. This author challenged Andy's commitment to a Biblical sexual ethic. No sex with either gender outside of heterosexual marriage. He mocked Andy as narrow and uninformed. Andy shared with this Christian author Desert Stream's commitment to provide safe and powerful opportunities for healing and for transformation of the homosexual.

This author said that Andy was shallow theologically and couldn't be taken seriously on the issue of homosexuality. Andy believes that God offers us a way back from our lostness. He believes that the Bible always mingles together maximum grace and a maximum call to holiness and righteousness. But over the years, Andy has been regularly attacked – not only from the unsaved world, but also from well known Christians who have adopted the world's standards.

One of Andy's Seminary professors at Fuller Theological Seminary regularly used to confront him in the hallway and say to him, "When are you going to drop the pretense and return to your homosexuality?" Day after day this professor would stop him in the hall – look him in the eye and say, "How long before you fall back into homosexuality?" Here is a Christian professor who hated Andy's advocacy for the healing of homosexuals. Have you ever been mocked or experienced rejection because of your commitment to a biblical view of sexuality?

In 21st Century America we see the hostility of the world towards marriage. Americans have adopted a view of marriage that is absolutely hostile to the teachings of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ teaches marriage is for keeps and America teaches marriage until "our love fades."

We're not going to hear anybody say, "My marriage is disposable." Yet, almost everyone who gets married in America today swims in an ocean of opinion. It gives

us the option to leave. The message of America is, “If it gets too hard, there is always an out.”

We’ve moved from the Biblical standard that affairs are always wrong and always shameful to the perspective that affairs can often be justified – particularly if your spouse is unaffectionate or emotionally unavailable or doesn’t understand you and who are we to judge anyway? The Biblical standard of delaying gratification has been replaced in our instant society by an utter lack of tolerance for discomfort or frustration or pain. Will they hang on in a marriage when this moment you are unhappy?

In 21st Century America we see the world’s hostility towards followers of Christ in the area of education. My research assistant recently graduated from a local University. She told me she took a Buddhism class her junior year in college. She enjoyed the class, did very well – got top marks on every project and paper. At the time of her final exam she had a certain A+.

The professor that they would be doing, as a class, a group meditation “instead of a final exam.” And all you have to do to get an A was to show up. This Christian student felt very uncomfortable about participating in a group meditation so she went to talk with him afterwards. She explained that the professor should no more ask her to come a Buddhist meditation for an exam than he should ask a Jewish person to kneel down before a cross and worship Jesus.

The professor didn't seem to understand her problem. He asked, "What are afraid of?" She said, "Nothing. I just don't feel comfortable with this exam. I think it's in opposition to my Christian faith."

The professor said, "Come anyway. Give it a shot. If you feel uncomfortable you can leave at any time." On the day of the final exam when they arrived at the classroom, there was a note saying the exam had been moved to the chapel on campus. When the class arrived there, this Christian student saw a large statue of the Buddha sitting on an alter and there was a single light focused on it. All the other lights were out.

They were supposed to sit around this statue of Buddha, staring at it and meditating. The Christian student strongly felt it wasn't appropriate for her to participate in this event so she turned around and left and she got a C in the class.

Have you ever encountered hostility to your Christian faith or your children's Christian faith in school?

The Atlantic Monthly, a couple of weeks ago, published an article entitled "People Like Us," in which the author writes, "It is striking that the institutions that talk the most about diversity often practice it the least. For example, no group of people sings the diversity anthem more frequently or fervently than administrators at elite universities in America.

But elite universities are amazingly un-diverse in their values, politics, and mores. Professors in particular are drawn from a rather narrow segment of the population. If faculties reflected the general populations, 32% of professors would be registered Democrats, and 31% would be registered Republicans, 40% would be Evangelical Christians.

But a recent study of several universities found that roughly 90% of professors in the Arts and Sciences who registered with a political party had registered Democratic. 57 professors at Brown University were found on the voter registration roles. Of those, 54 were Democrats. Of the 42 professors in the English, History, Sociology and Political Science Department – all were democrats; all were pro-choice and all strongly advocated gay rights.

The results at Harvard, Penn State, Maryland and the University of California of Santa Barbara were similar to the results at Brown. The author concludes that someone who is an outspoken Christian, is strongly pro-life, and pursues a career as a liberal arts professor is either a hero or a fool.

In 21st Century America we find hostility from the world in the Media. In my book, *Who is My Enemy? Welcoming People The Church Rejects* I say that, at least in the elite media – The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Los Angeles Times, Time Magazine, Newsweek, CBS, NBC, ABC, CNN – the world's hostility towards Christ is shown in the regular view of Christianity as being either irrelevant or irrational.

The executive editor of the New York Times confessed candidly in 1977, that he helped promote Christianity's irrelevance. He said, "I realize that in decades of reporting, writing or assigning stories on human rights, I rarely touched on one of the most important rights. Political human rights, legal, civil, and press rights, emphatically; but the right to worship where and how God or our conscious leads, almost never.

When religion does appear on the radar screen of the media, it almost always does so in its most irrational form. The latest battle between science and religion, or the latest witchcraft scare at a local public school, or the most recent completely harmless book being selected for censorship by fundamentalist parents. In the media the word "Fundamentalist" or "Evangelical" is almost always a shorthand for "religious fanatic." And it's usually accompanied by adjectives such as "ultra-conservative" or "right-wing."

Of course, Christian values are regularly under assault in popular movies, television shows and popular music. Michael Medved, the movie critic, in his very popular book, Hollywood VS America, writes about a movie that came out involving horrible gore, cannibalism, excrement, sex with the dead. He says the movie was from beginning to end unrelieved ugliness, horror and depravity. Medved writes this shocking statement: "Naturally, the critics loved it."

One critic wrote in the New York Times of this movie in which there is the most abominable depravity as something profound and extremely rare – a work so intelligent and powerful that it evokes our best emotions. One of the critics gave the movie their coveted 2 thumbs up. A movie critic from Time Magazine said of this movie that was exemplary, exciting, extraordinary, splendid, meticulous, extravagant. It deserves the rating “X” as in Excellent. Have you parents struggled with the media your children are exposed to?

And finally we see the assault of the world in consumerism.

What is it that people notice about America when they visit from other countries? Is it our spirituality, our deep devotion to Jesus Christ, the obviousness of our Christian faith? Truly the most noticeable thing that people from other countries encounter on their first trip to America is the overwhelming consumerism and materialism of our country.

Let’s say you’re planning to go to the beach. What should you carry along with you? You certainly would need a pair of sunglasses. How about a pair of Christian Dior sunglasses? They’re only \$394.99 – it’s on sale, it’s a good deal as the advertisement reads. Dior is the very essence of beauty and style. The Dior style is designed with adjustable nose pads for superb comfort and light-weight, scratch or impact resistant polycarbonate lenses insuring 100% UV protection. Includes an authentic Dior case. \$394.99 – you get the case thrown in for free!

You've got to lay on something on the beach. How about a nice blanket? For only \$1775.00. Now, you're not going to go the beach without a robe. What about this woven cashmere robe which is lined in pure silk? You can get this robe from Neiman Marcus for only \$850.00. Of course, don't want to get burned at the beach. How about some Nars Body Glow. It's only \$55.00 a bottle and it's made from pure coconut oil and extract from the Tiar flower. Its body glow oil creates a lustrous glistening glow.

Now, ladies, you're not just going to complete this ensemble with any sandals. Make yourself feel good walking to the beach in a pair of Prada Sandals – white leather with leather hand cut flowers only \$649.00 and that's on sale; it's a good deal.

Because you're dragging so much stuff to the beach, you have to put it in some sort of a bag ... how about carrying all of your junk to the beach in Christian Dior limited edition Punk Print Columbus Avenue Bag for \$2,050.00? Four pouches, polish metal hardware and an adjustable shoulder strap. While at the beach, wouldn't it be nice if you didn't just have to lie down on your blanket, but sit on a Oscar De La Renta Luxury Outdoors Conch Chaise lounge. This, according to the advertisement, is the quintessential lounge chair – perfect for stretching out with a thick novel and drifting into an afternoon nap. It's only \$4,190.00, but you can get it at Kittles at Easton for a mere \$2,700.00.

How you going to haul all this stuff to the beach? You're not going to throw it in the back of your 1973 pea green Pinto. You're best bet is putting it all in the back of your

Hummer. It's only \$48,000.00. Of course, if you got the H1, you'd pay \$100,000.00 and you could drive to the beach taking up 2 parking spots. In fact you could drive through cement barricades, boardwalks, over the top of piers and if a tug boat broke down you could pull a passing cruise ship.

Hostility from the world. Sometimes in the form of physical violence, sometimes by a steady attack on sexual standards, on marriage and family, in our educational system, in the media, by communicating that life is in fact found in the abundance of possessions. Have you ever experienced this hostility?

How can a Christian stand up to this onslaught? Fortunately we don't have to stand alone. Jesus promises us a Helper.

"When the Counselor 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. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning." (John 15:26,27)

We do not face the battle alone. Have you ever had the experience of the Holy Spirit's help when you are being attacked at every turn from the world? I've told this story before, but years ago I worked briefly for a private Law Firm. One the firm's clients was a man named Larry Flint, the publisher of Hustler Magazine. Larry Flint was being sued by a man named Bob Guccione, the publisher of Penthouse Magazine.

The firm asked me to go through Penthouse Magazines to dig up dirt on its publisher, Bob Guccione. As a follower of Christ, of course I couldn't do that. I was called into the managing partner's office and he began laying into me. He said, you know, we had a partnership meeting last night and we're not sure we can have somebody here with your kind of moral reservations.

I was only 24 years old – fresh out of Law School. My wife Marlene had recently quit her job as a Social Worker. She was 7 months pregnant. We had just bought a house. Mine was the sole income. This guy was about 25 years older than me. He was standing over me yelling at me.

He told me the firm couldn't have somebody there with my kind of moral reservations. A career – my financial future – my family – it was all just hanging by thin strand.

In that moment I felt what I would later attribute to the filling of the Holy Spirit in the most remarkable way. Rather than being frightened or feeling overwhelmed, I felt the most extraordinary freedom and boldness. This man was screaming at me saying, "We can't have someone here with your kind of moral reservations." I looked him in the eye and said, "Let's be honest with each other. You can't have somebody working for your firm who has any kind of moral reservations."

He said, "No, we can't have somebody with your kind of reservations."

I said, “Again, let’s be honest with each other. You’re looking for someone who is totally a-moral.”

That was the end of my very brief legal career at that firm. Even though there was a cost to my discipleship, I did not feel abandoned or alone. The Counselor – my Defense Attorney – testified through me and to me that God was there and God was with me.

Have you ever had that experience? There’s nothing more wonderful, when the heat is turned up, than to feel the presence of God equipping you – giving you wisdom ... and knowing exactly the right thing to say. We don’t have to fear the world.

Jesus never says fear the world. Never fear the hostility. Never fear the erosion of culture. Never fear the government.

He does tell us to fear something. I want to close with this

“All this I have told you so that you will not go astray. They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you. I did not tell you this at first because I was with you. (John 16:1-4)

There's only one thing you should fear. Fear walking away from Jesus Christ. Fear being unfaithful. Fear compromising your witness. Fear being unwilling to pay the price.

Don't be afraid of them. Fear your own sin. And in that place of fear, cry out to God. Ask Him. Repeatedly ask Him, "Help me Father, to continually choose for you. Help me to not run from the line of battle as a coward or as a traitor. Wherever You've placed me in the fight, help me to be strong and very courageous. Father, help me to pay the cost of being a disciple of Your Son, Jesus Christ.

Let's Pray

- I. The Demand of a Cost
- II. The Description of the Cost: Hostility from the World (John 15:18-25)
 - A. Hostility and Its Explanation
 - 1. A Sociological Reality (John 15:18,19)
 - 2. A Theological Necessity (John 15:20,21)
 - 3. An Irrational Hostility (John 15:22-25)
 - B. Hostility in the Early Church
 - C. Hostility in the Modern World
 - D. Hostility in America
 - 1. In Sexual Ethics
 - 2. In Marriage and Family
 - 3. In Education
 - 4. In the Media
 - 5. In Consumerism
- III. Help in Paying the Cost (John 15:26,27)
- IV. A Warning About the Cost (John 16:1-4)