

# Have You Counted the Cost?

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[ 0 : 00 ] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

John 15, beginning in verse 17. This is our Lord. These things I command you so that you will love one another.

If the world hates you, know that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own.

But because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, a servant is not greater than his master.

If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name.

[ 1 : 17 ] Because they do not know him who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin.

But now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my father also. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not have been guilty of sin.

But now they have seen and hated both me and my father. But the word that is written in their law must be fulfilled.

They hated me without a cause. But when the helper comes who I will send to you from the father, the spirit of truth who proceeds from the father, he will bear witness about me.

And you also will bear witness because you have been with me from the beginning. I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away.

[ 2 : 29 ] 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.

And they will do these things because they have not known the father nor me. But I have said these things to you that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told them to you.

This is the word of the Lord. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[ 4 : 30 ] The most fascinating thing about him is that one of his grandsons is still alive. Harrison Ruffin Tyler lives in the same county of Virginia where his grandparents were married in 1776.

When were your grandparents married? Born in 1928, he's now 96 years old, has lived through the roaring 20s, the Great Depression, the attack on Pearl Harbor, the rise and fall of the Third Reich.

He heard the Beatles' Yet it's much closer.

The past is always closer than we think. As William Faulkner once said, the past is never dead. It's not even past.

In our passage this morning, Jesus transitions from teaching his disciples how to abide in him, how to abide in the vine. He is the vine. We are the branches.

[ 5 : 58 ] He transitions to prepare them for the opposition. He transitions to prepare them for the opposition they will face. Even though all the opposition these original recipients face has already passed, the words of Jesus are as vivid and vital as they were that night.

Regardless of whether you believe America began as a Christian nation, biblical Christianity is facing more opposition in America than perhaps at any time.

One sociologist, biblical sociologist maybe, said that for quite a while, and I think it's a pretty helpful grid, America lived in a positive world in which believing and following the teaching of Jesus Christ had a positive impact on you and your reputation in the community.

After that, there was a bit of a neutral world where believing and following the teachings of Jesus Christ was generally neutral in how you were viewed and how people related to you in the community.

He argues, and I think he's right, now we live in a negative world where believing and following the teaching of Jesus Christ has a negative impact, a net negative on your reputation and your relationships in the world.

[ 7 : 17 ] Now, we still live in Athens, Tennessee, so maybe it's a little better. It's a new day is what he's trying to get at. A different day. It's Pride Month, a month in which our culture applauds the assault on God's creation, order, and design for family relations.

But increasingly, it's not Pride Month, but Pride Year. It's every week. Every month. The effect has been those who believe and follow the teachings of Jesus are at best seen as naive, but increasingly seen as bigoted, judgmental, and dangerous.

But what you must see, what we must see, there's nothing new under the sun. The past is always closer than we think. For the vast majority of Christian history, the primary problem facing those who believe and follow the teachings of Jesus has been the opposition of those who don't.

We must not be surprised. That's what Jesus is doing this night. Preparing. They're in a bit of a wonderful situation. The Lord is there, the last supper, the upper room, and he's sending them out as sheep among wolves.

Be innocent as doves, but shrewd as a serpent. We must be as well. And a word where we're going is, every Christian must be prepared to calmly endure opposition and continually joyfully worshiping, witnessing to Christ.

[ 8 : 49 ] And every Christian must be prepared to calmly endure opposition and continue joyfully witnessing to Christ. Break this out. Three points. The first is every Christian must expect the hatred of the world.

Every Christian must expect the hatred of the world. Jesus prepares his disciples for what they're going to face by beginning in saying, expect hatred. Now Jesus transitions in verse 17 from his teaching on the vine.

This teaching on the vine to teaching them about opposition. If you remember, Jesus said, I am the vine. You all, all of you, all of my people are my branches.

You're all part of me, and that's why you're called to love one another. Remember when I was talking about that. He calls out a people that are called to love one another. Jesus came to create this community of love. And so he says, my commandment is you love one another.

But he's saying here, this community of love is set in opposition from and opposed by the world. I chose you out of the world.

[ 10 : 01 ] Whereas love is repeated in the previous text. It's just love, love, love, love, love. Hate is repeated here. Whereas love is meant to be the most natural virtue for the Christian, hate is the most natural vice for the unbeliever, for the world.

The world hates Christians because of who they are. Look in verse 18. If the world hates you, and the assumption is it will, know that it has hated me before you.

If you are of the world, the world would love you as its own. But because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Now, the world quite obviously runs through those verses.

When Jesus is using the word world here, he's not talking about his father's world where nature sings or the whole world that he has in his hands. He's talking about those in the world, those in this world, in active rebellion against him.

For God so loved the world. For God so loved those in active rebellion against him. So he says later in 1 John, do not love the world or the things of the world.

[ 11 : 18 ] It's fine to love a good sunset or a well-cooked steak, but it's not fine to love the world in rebellion against God. It's not fine to celebrate what God forbids or neglect what he commands.

But here Jesus is addressing us on opposition from the world, from those rebelling against God. If the world hates you, know it hated me.

If you are of the world, the world would love you as its own. What exactly is Jesus saying there? You know, we're trained to love our own, to love our crew.

Hashtag my people, you know. We're trained to love these people. And we're encouraged to be suspicious of those we don't know. Don't open the door to strangers. But that's not what Jesus is

talking about here.

He's not talking about being chummy with your friends. And unchummy, I guess, with those you don't know. He's saying.

[12:18] He's not saying the world hates you because you're strangers. He's saying the world hates you because you follow Christ and because you are called out of it. I chose you out of the world.

Therefore, the world hates you. Apart from grace, the New Testament says all people are blinded in unbelief by the God of this world. Following the course of this world.

Conformed to this world. Living in rebellion of the passions of our flesh. But Christians are no longer of the world in that respect. They're still in the world.

But they've been transferred from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of God's son. The result has been a radical change of allegiance. For those who follow Christ, their first allegiance is no longer to a flag, a country, or a man.

It's no longer to a political party or being politically correct. It's no longer to what their family said. Jesus came to bring peace, not a sword between father and son, and mother and son, daughter.

[13:29] Or what their friends think or what's in vogue. Their first allegiance now belongs to Jesus Christ. And the world doesn't like it. That's what he's saying. There's this distinctness that's happened as a result of the gospel that the world doesn't like.

The world is a society where the people of God are a community of love set in opposition to the world. The world is a society of rebels. They cannot stand those who don't pay allegiance to the same things they do.

So what do we have to do for the world to hate us? Now some Christians are hated for the wrong reason. Proverbs 18.6 says, A fool's mouth invites a beating.

Everyone who has met a young punk Christian that has all the answers and needs a good punch in the mouth. Just the man to do it. These verses give little permission to the Christian firebrand who starts his own fire.

Little permission to the Christian firebrand who starts his own fire. The point is, all you have to do is demonstrate that your first allegiance is to Christ and the world will hate you.

[14:42] All you have to do is refuse to conform. Be not conformed to this world. All you have to do is refuse to conform and the world will hate you. If you're a teenager, all you have to do is refuse drugs and premarital sex.

You'll be hated. If you're newly married, all you have to do is refuse the overreach of a controlling mother-in-law and you'll be hated. Now, maybe that's oversaid, you know, but it's true.

If you're an employee, all you have to do is refuse to go along with the water cooler crudeness or the hallway slander or the misuse of the company's money and you will be hated.

If you're a young family, all you have to do is make fixed commitments to God, to church, to giving before anything else and you'll be hated. The idea is all you have to do is refuse to conform and you'll be hated.

Maybe not immediately hated, but you'll be disliked. It begs the question, does anyone find your allegiance to Christ obvious and distasteful?

[15:52] Does your allegiance to Christ get in the way of other things sometimes such that it annoys and frustrates those around you? Does anyone hate you?

If no one hates you, you may not be a Christian. If everyone hates you, let's talk after the meeting. But if no one hates you, you may not be a Christian.

Seriously. Because fish swimming upstream don't fit with all the fish going downstream.

The world hates you because of who you are. It also hates you because of Jesus Christ. Jesus continues with a command. Look in verse 20. He says, remember the word that I said to you. A servant is not greater than his master.

If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. Now, Jesus has already said this, right? A servant is not greater than his master.

[16:57] That's what he said after he washed the disciples' feet. If I wash your feet, so too you must selflessly serve other people because a servant is not greater than his master. Anything too low for you, you know?

It shouldn't be. But he's saying the same thing here. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. It shouldn't be surprising. It's what he's saying. But as he continues, if they persecuted me,

they'll persecute you.

If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. The idea is not all people persecuted Jesus. Some did not. You know, he had some followers. He at least had 12 disciples. Not all rejected his word. Some received it. The idea is Jesus is or was a fork in the road. People responded to him in one way or another. He said the same thing is going to happen to you if you follow Jesus Christ. You will be a fork in the road. Not in the sense that you force people to do decision, but in the sense that Jesus in you will be so irrepensible that people will either accept you or reject you.

[ 17 : 55 ] They'll accept his word or reject you. They'll persecute you or not. Now Jesus continues and says, look at verse 21, all these things they will do to you on account of my name.

So the fork in the road is all about your relationship to Jesus Christ. Psalm 69 says, the reproaches of you fall on me.

Well, that's what happens for those who follow Jesus Christ. The reproaches that are aimed at Jesus Christ strike you as well. Jesus even says, verse 22, if I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse.

Now obviously Jesus doesn't mean they weren't guilty of sin before. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. The heart is deceitful above all things. Who can, desperately wicked, who can understand it?

That's not what he means. But what he's saying is, is, is, is, is their, their guilt is compounded because they refuse Jesus Christ.

[ 19 : 06 ] It was one thing for Sodom to reject the goodness of God found in the covenant. It was one thing for Nineveh to strike down the people of God and to reject the goodness of God.

But it's a whole nother thing for those who see God in the flesh to reject it. And that's what he's saying. Their guilt is compounded because they've rejected Jesus Christ and hated him.

And it reveals that they don't just hate him. They hate their father, his father as well. Such that in verse 25, the word that is written in, their law must be fulfilled.

They hated me without cause. He gave them a chance and they hated him. So why is Jesus teaching his disciples all of this?

Why must we learn that Christians will be hated? Jesus wants to adjust our expectations. 1 John 3 says, Don't be surprised, therefore, that the world hates you.

[ 20 : 16 ] Why would we be surprised? Why would we be taken off guard? Because we expected something different.

He's calling us to adjust our expectation, to count the cost. Many times the gospel in this land is presented because generally there's not much persecution.

The gospel in this land is presented with no hook. Not hard to follow Jesus Christ here. Generally, until now. And so we present the gospel only talking about the hope of eternal life.

The love of God found in Jesus Christ. The general blessing that flows to those in him. But not encouraging people to count the cost. In the age of exploration, Ernest Shackleton, this great explorer, was determined to reach Antarctica.

He was a bad man. You know, he ran a crew of bad men. I guess bad in a good sense. I have to affirm that with my kids sometimes. Bad in a good sense. He needed a crew willing to endure the costly mission to get there.

[ 21 : 27 ] Throughout the streets of London, before they took off by boat, he posted this announcement. Men wanted for hazardous journey.

Small wages. Bitter cold. Long months of complete darkness. Yeah, I'm in. Instant danger.

Safe return? Doubtful. Honor and recognition in case of success. You know, our presentation of the gospel needs a bit of that.

Did you hear what happened to Jesus? Jesus? There's a cost. Servant's not great in his master. Flannery O'Connor once said, push back against the age as hard as it pushes against you. When people don't realize, what people don't realize is how much religion costs.

[ 22 : 34 ] They think faith is a big electric blanket. When, of course, it is the cross. Without the cost, who wouldn't be a follower of Jesus Christ?

Point two, every Christian must expect to bear witness in the world. Every Christian must expect to bear witness in the world. He turns and, after saying, expect hatred, he says, bear witness.

You know, the first little section of our passage talks about the cause of this persecution, God's work in us through Jesus Christ, such that the world hates us. Then at the end, it kind of talks about

the disciples, how they must respond to persecution.

So it seems like these verses are out of place because now we're talking about the Spirit coming and what the Spirit is going to do. But I think they're perfectly situated because the Spirit coming assures the disciples that persecution will not snuff them out or snuff out the gospel.

We've already seen references to the Spirit, but here we see more. Look at verse 26. When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.

[ 23 : 54 ] And you also will bear witness because you've been with me from the beginning. Like I said, this is the third statement about the Helper, the paraclete. Somehow it refers, that's just the nominative, the Greek word.

The word is translated different ways. Counselor, Helper, Comforter, Advocate. The best translation in English, I think, is Advocate because the Spirit is meant to be more than a shrink with whom we tell our feelings.

The Spirit of truth is one who comes with us, defends us, helps us, encourages us, strengthens us, causes our gospel efforts to be fruitful.

So what's going on in the midst of all this hatred and opposition? The Lord is going to send His own witness to the truth. Jesus is the truth and He's sending the Spirit of truth to witness to Him.

Now the points are clear enough. The Spirit will come and He will bear witness and the disciples will bear witness as well. I love this.

[ 25 : 05 ] There's just so much. You can preach a whole sermon on this. But the idea, the Spirit will come and bear witness about me. The Spirit will come to point to, testify to me.

It's important to see that the Spirit is not a free agent, not a lone ranger, not a roaming spiritual slot machine dispensing experiences and gifts. Wherever He goes, the Spirit has a clear goal.

That is to magnify Jesus Christ. If you want to know what the job description of the Spirit is, it's kind of to just keep turning the flood lamp wherever it can go on Jesus. It's coming to bear witness to Jesus.

You want to find the Spirit? Find the Word of God and there the Spirit, they run together, two tracks of the train together and they bear witness about me.

That's the Spirit's job description. To bear witness, to point, to produce the fruit that aligns with a life committed to following Jesus Christ. But we bear witness as well.

[ 26 : 09 ] I don't think these are meant to be kind of in juxtaposition. The Spirit will bear witness.

You will bear witness. I think the idea is the Spirit will bear witness through you, through your words, through your actions.

Surely that is what affirmed and helped the disciples. They must have been told, or must have been thinking after all this talk about hatred, who's going to come to faith when we're getting mowed down?

Like who's coming to Christ when we're being strung up on our own cross? No one. Who's going to come to Christ when the mocking and ridicule start?

Well, the Spirit will testify to the truth. The Spirit will confirm the truth.

[ 27 : 09 ] The Spirit will bear witness through their word and actions. Even though Jesus is leaving, the Spirit will be enough to complete the work of God, complete the redemptive work to bring in the whole people of God of every tribe, tongue, and nation.

The Spirit will be enough. Now, He presses home this certainty even more. If we could hang on this for just a moment. Notice the difference in tenses in verse 26.

When the Spirit comes, I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father. He'll bear witness about me. Sin refers to something.

In the future, I will send in a future one-time event. I think that whom I will send refers to what Jesus does when He ascends to the right hand of the Father and pours down the Spirit at Pentecost.

This one-time redemptive event in which the Spirit falls on the people of God and remains with the people of God throughout the church age. That's what it's pointing to.

[ 28 : 13 ] I will send a future one-time event, but the Spirit still proceeds from the Father. Proceeds points to something present, something that's already happening.

I will send must be distinct from what's proceeding now. Many scholars over the years have argued that Jesus is referring to the relations among the Trinity.

Whereas the Father will send the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the Spirit always proceeds from the Father. They share one divine nature.

The Spirit begetting the Son, the uncreated Son from all eternity, and the Spirit proceeding from the Father. Now you're thinking, what does triune relations have to do with this?

I think what's going on, you will be my witnesses, Jesus says, because you've been with me from the beginning, but he will be my witness because he's been with me before the beginning.

[ 29 : 26 ] In the beginning, what we saw at the beginning, we didn't see it, but what is at the beginning of 1 John, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Well, we could say, in the beginning was the Spirit, with God, and with the Word. He's saying, he's all you need.

And the rest, as they say, is history. After Jesus sends the Spirit at Pentecost, Peter preaches, and 3,000 people are saved. They're not impressed by his biblical theology, though it's quite good in that short amount of time.

Or his delivery, they know that he was just a common, uneducated man. They're impressed by the Spirit of God on his life. They're impressed by this divine power. They're cut to the heart, and born again by the Spirit.

The story of Acts continues again and again. Peter, filled with the Spirit, confronts the religious leaders whom he cowered from just days before.

[ 30 : 26 ] Stephen, filled with the Spirit, testifies to the truth, as he's stoned to death. Paul, filled with the Spirit, confronts false teaching, and false teachers, brings many to the Lord, as they received the word from his mouth, not as the word of men, but as the word of God, which it really was.

The Spirit bears witness to the words of men. The rest of the New Testament agrees. No one comprehends the thoughts of God unless the Spirit of God empowers him.

No one can say, Jesus is Lord except by the Spirit of God. Those who are in the flesh, Romans 8, cannot please God, but all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

The Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. Jesus is alerting the disciples to a precious reality that Christianity is not a formula of words to recite.

It's not about making a decision or reciting a prayer or asking Jesus into your heart. Christianity is miracle or it's nothing. It's new life.

[ 31 : 31 ] It's so unlike everything that was before that it can only be called brand new. Regenesis. Rebegan.

Born again by the Spirit. The Spirit opens blind eyes, revives dead hearts through human words. There are many living in the South who've grown up in a Christian environment, Christian home, always gone to church and church activities, yet they're not Christian because they've never felt the force of Christianity.

The great preacher Martin Lloyd-Jones said, the only people who have a right to say anything about Christianity, this is so Martin Lloyd-Jones, the only people that have a right to say anything about Christianity are those who have felt the force in their own life.

I can tell you that's my story. I don't know how many altar calls I went down. Every one that happened around me, lest he come, take me out.

I remember in the summer, August 9, 2001, I was converted to saving faith in Jesus Christ. A couple months later, I was at an event. Yeah, the preacher did the sermon, then he did the altar call sermon.

[ 32 : 50 ] He invited people down. The first time I've been around one since I've asked the Lord, and you know, if you're anything like me, when you came to the Lord, it was a little hazy.

Not everything was ironed out yet. It's still not ironed out, but I was like, Lord, do I need to go up there? And this is subjective, but I had this sense, no, you're already mine.

I feel like the only scripture that described that moment right then was the spirit, bore witness with my spirit that I was a child of God. Now, my confidence in that, it's like a palm tree, you know, I'm not always real confident in it, but, yeah, point back.

I wouldn't be doing this if you weren't in me and working in me, and that's the truth, that's the certainty you must have. I hope you don't leave here if you don't have that certainty, if you don't know you're his.

Christianity has not borne witness with your spirit that you're a child. Point three, every Christian must expect to endure persecution by the world. Every Christian must expect to endure persecution by the world.

[ 34 : 15 ] Jesus prepares his disciples for the opposition they'll face and cause them to endure persecution. The idea is that emotional hate will soon turn to concrete action.

Look in verse 2 of chapter 16, 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. The hour is coming.

John has said again and again, my hour has not come. The hour often refers to the work of Jesus Christ. Now he's saying, the hour comes for those who follow him. The hour of persecution come for those who trust in Jesus Christ.

They'll be thrown out of the synagogue. What's that in reference to? When the first century in the first century in a Roman world, Christianity found some legal protection from being a subset of Judaism, but the Jewish people began throwing them out and saying, they're not Jews.

That's why they called them Christian. Christians was not a favorable term, but a derisive term saying, you're not one of us so that they could get the persecution from the Romans. They'll throw you out and then they'll kill you.

[ 35 : 28 ] Persecution is inevitable. All who desire to live a godly life will be persecuted. The emotional hatred of those who believe and follow the teaching of Jesus will turn into concrete action of opposition.

This is not outrage media. This is straight from our Lord's teaching. It may be gossip and slander. It may be mocking and ridicule, but it will come.

You know, sometimes we carry the assumption that people, people in our lives, people in this world will just accept and celebrate what we believe if we're winsome enough. People have said that.

Just, you gotta focus on being winsome enough.

Well, that's not true anymore. All you have to do is state the basic principles of biblical Christianity and you'll draw the ire of the world.

You'll draw their opposition. You can look at what Harrison Butker said a few weeks ago. Mocking and ridicule often goes beyond words into concrete actions.

[ 36 : 35 ] Concrete actions often lead to imprisonment and martyrdom. If you believe and follow the teachings of Jesus Christ, familiarize yourself with the martyrs.

Buy a copy of Fox's Book of Martyrs. It captures so many of the martyrs in England under Bloody Mary.

before it was a drink. It was a wicked queen. Don't assume the day of martyrs is over. Inside one of the seals in Revelation, there are the martyrs waiting for their full number.

Who's to say anybody in this room won't be martyred for their faith? Who can say that? Our Lord surely wouldn't.

Persecution, sadly, is sometimes done in the name of God. They'll think they're offering service to God. Persecution, most often, if we follow Jesus' life and the life of the first, or the church in the first century, is not often at the hands of humanity at its worst, but at humanity at its best.

[ 37 : 57 ] It's not often the liberal government or the rebellious culture, but those who think they're following Christ. That's where persecution comes from. Be careful where your guns are aimed.

They sang a hymn after Thomas Cranmer.

I mean, they heard a sermon after Thomas Cranmer was burned at the stake because it was an offering. Though persecution still opposes and kills Christians, it has not stopped the spread of Christianity.

T.S. Lewis says so wonderfully in mere Christianity, again and again, the world has thought Christianity was dying. Dying from persecutions from without or corruptions from within, but every time the world has been disappointed, its first disappointment was over the crucifixion.

The man came to life again. In a sense, and I quite realize how frightfully unfair it may seem to them, that has been happening ever since.

They keep on killing the thing he started and each time, just as they're patting down the earth on the grave, they suddenly hear that it's still alive and has even broken out in some new place.

[ 39 : 19 ] No wonder they hate us. Isn't that so great? Tertullian said, the blood of the martyrs deceive the church. Times of opposition throughout the history of church have not been the church's fatal hour.

Times of opposition have been the finest hour. Times of prosperity have not been good for the church, but times of adversity and opposition are always good.

So this is not a day for Christians to shiver in their holy huddle because the culture is affirming and celebrating something they're not. It's not a time for retreating. It's not a time for withdrawal. It's a time to witness to the truth of the gospel for living in the confidence that what he died to establish will keep on coming to life.

let God be true in every man a liar. Years ago, I read a story about a guy who bought a house with a strand of bamboo near the driveway.

Every man knows he hates that stuff, you know, no matter how much the kids love to look at it. He decided to get rid of it. Like, I gotta get rid of the bamboo. He cut it down at the roots.

[ 40 : 40 ] He took an axe to the roots and smashed them to pieces. And you're getting a lot of satisfaction in each of those strikes. He dug down and removed as much of the roots as possible.

He poured plant poisoning over everything that was left. He filled each of the holes where the bamboo roots were with several feet of gravel.

And then, taking no chances, he paved over the whole bit with cement. Two years later, he noticed something. A little green bamboo sprig pushing up through the cement.

People of God are like that. The plant of God is like that. Yeah. indefeatable. Mow us down and we'll smile.

Jesus, though, is not preparing, just preparing them for the inevitable. He's telling them all this so they would endure calmly. Look at verse 1. I've said all these things to keep you from falling away.

[ 41 : 59 ] Verse 4. I've said these things to you that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you. Telling you these things so you don't fall away.

The greatest danger of persecution is not death but falling away. there can be a great danger that the church trips up on from time to time of protecting ourselves from physical persecution, being preppers who prepare for whatever might come but the real danger that often takes out the church is the deceit and unbelief that slivers underneath the wall.

The spiritual falling away. the backsliding. Protect your life. Go ahead but protect yourself most of all for this greatest temptation.

The temptation to recant. To deny him. Are you a friend? You're one of his friends, right?

No, I never knew him. All it takes is simple denial. So much of that opposition dissipates.

[ 43 : 24 ] Jesus is saying all these things so that you would not be surprised. You would be prepared. Remember. Don't forget. The past is always closer than we think.

These teachings of Jesus Christ press through the centuries to address us most appropriately now. Every Christian must be prepared to calmly endure opposition and continually joyfully witnessing to Christ.

Let us pray. Father, we thank you for your word and the joy of sitting under it. Father, we want to be a people distinct from the world not because of our loud mouths or our finger pointing and any of these things because of our love and of our allegiance to Jesus Christ.

I want to be a people that stand firm and don't fall away in days of threat whether they be merely of our reputation slander and gossip or they be more significant concrete acts of opposition.

We thank you Lord that you've not left us these things. We should not be surprised because we follow the one who was persecuted and crucified and crushed so we follow him in faith.

[ 45 : 00 ] Lord help us strengthen our weak knees and our feeble faith to hide in you today and always. We pray in Christ's name. Amen. You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.

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