

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, September 28, 2011 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

CONTAGIOUS CHRISTIANS “A Christianity That’s Catching – A Study of 1 Thessalonians”

Dealing With Opposition *1 Thessalonians 2:1-12*

It’s not how we deal with the glorious moment of our life that makes one’s faith contagious, it’s how we deal with the difficult points that says it’s real... that it works. That makes our faith something that others want and desire in their own life. You know, contagious! Our faith becomes catching when others see that it works. However, the truth is it’s hard enough to stay on top in difficult times when everyone is pulling for us, giving us encouragement and hope, but let a little resistance occur, experience the devastating sting of criticism, let opposition to faith mount and it doesn’t take much to blow us away.

Perhaps the thought of opposition is a bit frightening to you. Being ridiculed and attacked can be difficult, and feeling like others are against us can cause us to feel like we are all alone. The truth is there is a war going on. It was declared in Eden and had continued to grow in its intensity. Our enemy has not given up the fight and laid down his battle weapons – he clutched them more tightly now than ever before. Satan’s battle is carried on by a variety of allies, usually unseen. If the enemy can silence us, quiet our faith, defeat us to the point of discouragement through opposition, he has won something of a victory at least in the lives of those who could potentially be impacted by the life of faith lived out in us. These opposing forces are hard at it day-in, day-out... in homes, on campuses, at the office, and in the churches... in the world.

If it is any comfort, the Apostle Paul experienced that very thing. Most of Paul’s letters were written to respond to some attack that had been made against him or to correct some error in the local situation. Paul, having written to the Thessalonian Christians, leaves us with some superb guidelines on how to keep going with a faith that is contagious when there are those who would like to see us succumb to the pressures of opposition.

I. CRUCIAL QUESTION AND PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS REGARDING OPPOSITION

The battle we face is between the beliefs and the life-styles of this world system and those of Jesus Christ. The Christian is a transplanted alien who – at the time of rebirth – took on a new address... namely, heaven. As aliens we must understand some basics of this world that we are left here to impact as “contagious Christians” in a world that is often in opposition to us as believers.

3 Critical Question Regarding Our Opposition:

1. **Who is behind our opposition? (1 John 5:19)** The Apostle John give us this insight into our world in 1 John 5:19, “*We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.*” John tells us that “the whole world is under the control of the evil one.” In other words, the opposition – when traced back to its ultimate origin – leads

right into the lap of the wicked one, Satan himself. This truth may become more important as you attempt to deal with opposition in a way that allows your life to continue to be light in the darkness. You see, ultimately, the opposition you and I deal with indeed does go deeper than where we often attribute it. Our anger and resentment toward those who attack us may need to be redirected to the one who is really trying to take you down as a follower of Christ. Satan, the enemy of our God, knows that he can't have you if you belong to Christ and are a child of God's, but he can attack you, and discourage you, and bring all kinds of assault on your life. Beware!

2. **Why are we opposed? (Matthew 10:22)** Jesus, in speaking to his disciple, gave them (and all of His followers) this warning in Matthew 10:22, *"All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved."* Here is a simple truth communicated to us from Jesus, Himself. We are opposed precisely because of Jesus. If you are His, you are not His enemies, and he will attack you. Don't be surprised when you are opposed. Be surprised if you are not opposed. Believers will rub the world the wrong way. Believers' lives will be a point of conviction for unbelievers. Believers will in opposition to the world.
3. **How are we to respond to opposition? (Romans 12:17-21)** The way the world responds to opposition is to fight it. The way Jesus responded to opposition was to turn the other cheek... to die for it. Paul give us clear guidelines for responding to the opposition that is sure to be our... and this God inspired way of responding is contagious. *"Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."* Listen that is contagious!

5 Practical Solutions for Dealing with Opposition

- (1) **Decide not to react (or overreact) to opposition** – *"Do not repay (lash back) anyone evil for evil..."* No knee-jerk reaction when you are opposed. Don't respond! Wait!
- (2) **Remain right and rightly related to God in the face of opposition** – *"...Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody"* In other words handle the situation rightly and righteously. Righteousness means being rightly related to God. Ask you self what would Jesus, who I am in relationship with, do? Then be sure to act according.
- (3) **Exhibit peace and resolve, not war and revenge** – *"If it is possible, as far as depends on you, live at peace with everyone."* The opposite of peace is war. Paul is being honest in his assessment of how we usually handle opposition... declaring war on our enemies. Paul's advice for dealing with opposition is to "sign a peace treaty"... work towards "a peace treaty." Diplomacy! That is wisdom! A word of caution... some people are toxic and the best resolution and the best way to keep peace is to get away from them. Sometimes that is the best option to opposition... remove yourself for their own good and yours also.
- (4) **Rely on God to take care of the situation** – *"Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord."* This is not a "Sic' em' God" mentality! That is often who we want to react to those who oppose us. God get 'em God! They have hurt me! That is not the idea that God had in mind here when He divinely inspired these words from Paul. Rather, it is the idea of turning the situation (our opposition, and opponents) over to God and let His perfect work in their life take it's course. God can handle our opponents better than we can. Can I suggest that we turn them over to God and them pray for them... not against them.
- (5) **Treat your opposition well** - *On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his*

head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." That last phrase pretty much says it all... overcome evil with good. Be good to those who oppose you. Love them. Show them grace. Show them kindness even when it's not coming your way. God can work in that kind of environment and do miraculous things. It's contagious!

Practical Tip: Don't expect to make an impact for Christ, be truly contagious Christian, without opposition. You are going to be opposed sometimes as a believers, misinterpreted, misrepresented, and misunderstood, ridiculed, rejected and sometimes maligned, disliked and you may not even understand it. Don't be surprised, but be surprising in your reaction to that opposition.

II. AN ALTERNATE PLAN FOR CHRISTIANS (1 Thessalonians 2:1-6)

As we turn our focus to 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12, let's begin by getting our bearings with some background material. If it is any comfort, the Apostle Paul experienced that very thing. Most of Paul's letters were written to respond to some attack that had been made against him or to correct some error in the local situation. Paul now moves into a direct defense of his conduct and ministry in Thessalonica. Apparently, both his motives and his methods of ministry had come under fire, attack and opposition by some who wanted to discredit him and his ministry. The matter was critical, for if Paul or his ministry could be destroyed through opposition, then the very foundation of the church at Thessalonica – and everywhere else for that matter – could be undermined. On the other hand, if Paul could stand strong in his faith and rise above the opposition that was being mounted against him, God would not only strengthen and bolster the faith of the new believers at Thessalonica, but that kind of faith would be catching and empowering to believers everywhere, who in his day were often being persecuted, ridiculed and daily faced opposition. We are grateful for these attacks on Paul, because they drew from him these magnificent letters. We learn more about the practical side of our faith through Paul dealing with these opposition he faced, that we ever imagined. Beneath the surface of this passage there run the slanders and opposition which Paul's opponents at Thessalonica leveled against him:

1. **Character attacks/assassination (v. 2)** – Verse 2 refers to the imprisonment and abuse that he had received at Philippi (Acts. 16:16-40). There were, no doubt, those in Thessalonica who said that his man (Paul) had a prison record, that he was nothing more than a criminal who was on the run from justice, and that obviously no one could listen to a man like that. If they can't attack our message, beware, they will attack us personally, calling our character. "Well will why would I want to go to church there, there are just a bunch of hypocrites down there. They are no better than I am. I know old Joe goes to church there and he has been married before, cheated on his wife, and use to be an old drunk." You see the opposition sometimes comes from those who God is dealing with and the Holy Spirit is convicting and the only way they can deal with it is to attack others and tear them down. It makes them feel better about themselves.

Our response/reaction to this charge: Grace toward others - Remember that we are forgiven, redeemed and whatever is in our past that has been through the filter of repentance and confession has been removed from us as far as the east is from the west. Don't allow past failures, when they are brought up against us to cripple us in our faith today. Rather, season those kinds of character attacks with grace and love toward the attacker. This kind of reaction is Christ like, who taught us to turn the other cheek and who responded to his attackers from the cross with "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do!" That kind of reaction is contagious and infectious.

2. **Question motive and message -** Verse 3 has behind it no fewer than 3 chargers. (1) It was being said that Paul's teaching came from nothing else than sheer delusion. However, against this charge, Paul said in the first part of *verse 3, "For the appeal we make (our message) does*

not spring from error...” He asserts that “his message” (appeal) was true and not erroneously false. Paul was being opposed by those who said his message was false, that he was delusional, but Paul was in good company here. There was a time when Jesus’ friends and family came and tried to take Him home because they thought that He was mad, out of his mind and delusional (see Mark 3:21). Listen the Christian message can be so different from the standards of the world that he who follows them with a single, unswerving devotion and burning enthusiasm can appear to other men to be off his head. When Peter and the disciples got on fire for God at Pentecost what did the people say about them? They are drunk out of their minds. I don’t believe that charge was leveled against them just because of their behavior, but because of their message and devotion to it. (2) It was also said that Paul’s preaching sprang from impure motives. In response to this Paul said in **verse 3**, *“For the appeal we make (our message) does not spring from error or impure motives...”* Our motives were not “impure” Paul says. What “motives” were they calling into question? The word that is used for “impure” (akatharsia) means “unclean,” literally morally unclean, and is suggestive of the fact that sensuality and evil doctrine are frequently associated. Paul’s opposition may have been trying to discredit his message and motives by somehow tying them to the pagan practices of the day. The accusation must have come from the leaders of the synagogues, for the culture around Thessalonica was flagrantly permissive in matter of sexuality. Cult prostitution and sexually charged rites of worship was not uncommon in the pagan religion practices in and around Thessalonica. The opposition, which was primarily Jewish, was trying to discredit the Christian message and movement being promoted by Paul by to these other pagan religions and practices. (3) It was also charged that Paul’s preaching was slyly aimed at deluding other, that, in fact, he was not deluded nearly so much as he was deluding. Paul says in **verse 3**, *“For the appeal we make (our message) does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you.”* The word translated at “trick” or “deceit” originally referred to catching a fish with bait, and thus come to mean any method of deception to trap or catch another. In other words, Paul was being accused of trying to manipulate or hook people into something. All of this was a part of the opposition trying to discredit Paul by calling into question his motives and his message. Cast a “shadow of a doubt” over him and people will begin to buy it.

Our response/reaction to this charge: Transparent honesty – When our message and motives are called into question there is really little we can do except stand by our message, be sure that our motives are pure, and be totally transparent about both (our message and motives). Our message, the message of Christ, the gospel message, can stand on its own. It has for thousands of years. God really doesn’t need us to defend Him or His truth... it’s His message. People can challenge and question our motives, and sometimes we do need to be honest with ourselves and transparent about our motives... take an honest look at our motives. If they are pure, stand on it and be totally transparent about it. This kind of honesty and transparency is very attractive and refreshing in a world where people are often disingenuous and less than upfront about life in general. It will make you contagious!

3. **Seeking the praise of men (v.4)** - Verse 4 indicates that Paul was accused of seeking to please men rather than to please God. The end of **verse 4** says, *“...We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts.”* And in verses 5 and 6 this accusation from those opposing Paul is further qualified when Paul says in **verse 5**, *“You know we never used flattery...”* and **verse 6** he specifically state his case again, *“We are not looking for the praise from men, not from you or anyone else...”* Evidently there were those who in opposition to Paul were trying to say, “Paul is just out to make a name for himself, to win your favor, and get you on his side. He is only after praise and power from men.” The word that is used for “flattery” in verse 5 always describes the flattery which flatters in order to get something; it is flattery from motives of gain. In this case it was the “praise of man” that Paul’s detractors were accusing him of seeking to

gain. Again, Paul, in no uncertain terms, makes it abundantly clear he is not out to please man but God... not the men (people) of Thessalonica or anywhere else.

Our response/reaction to this charge: Dependence on God – Paul mentions several times in verses 4 and 5, his dependence on God in the midst of this accusation that he is seeking the praise of men. He says in verse 4, “... we speak as men approved by God.” It’s only God’s approval we need. We are dependent on Him. Later in verse 4 he says, “We are not trying to please men, but God, who test our hearts.” In other words, we don’t have to worry about what men say about us or our motives. God sees our heart. We are dependent only on His opinion of us. In verse 5 against the accusation of those opposing him, Paul says, “God is our witness.” We will rely... depend on God against these charges. I love that. It communicates a confidence and dependence on something and someone outside of themselves, and bigger than those who oppose us. Man is looking for hope and answers when life bounces out of control. Our dependence on a God who is big enough handle our situation, beyond what any man can do, is something that make our faith contagious. Once again, what the world wants to know is does faith work. Paul says, “God is my witness...”

III. A CONTAGIOUS STRATEGY FOR DEALING WITH OPPOSITION (1 Thess. 2:7-12)

What traits should a contagious Christian, despite opposition? Paul suggest 4 of these in vv. 7-12.

Contagious Traits for Christians in the Face of Opposition:

1. **A sensitivity to needs (v.7)** – Paul’s words state it well, “But we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children.” There is no brush stroke of selfishness in the picture painted here. A mother is deeply committed to meeting the needs of her children. Also, unlike anyone else, a mother can sense the needs of her children even when they are not evident to themselves or others. Contagious Christians should try to cultivate the same kind of selfless, sensitive, and tender care for those who may even oppose them
2. **An affection for people (v. 8a)** – Paul remarked that he had a “love” for the Thessalonians. He treated people not as means to an end, but as ends who were valuable in and of themselves and to the Kingdom of God. He was not cool and distant but warm and close. In like manner, contagious Christians should love people as Jesus loved people... even His enemies... loving them in practical and appropriate ways.
3. **An authenticity of life (vv.8b-10)** – Paul and his companions in ministry imparted not only the gospel by also their own lives. They lived out what they proclaimed without erecting barriers that would make them aloof. They were transparent, authentic, and honest, just as we should be today as contagious Christians.
4. **An enthusiastic in affirmation (v.11)** – In verse 11, Paul compares contagious Christian who are impacting their world for Christ (even in the face of opposition) to fathers, “For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children.” A good father will continue to encourage and affirm his child through his or her task, no matter what comes (even opposition). People need this kind of enthusiastic support as well. We need each other as we face opposition and attempt to remain strong in developing our own faith .
5. **A worthy walk (v.12)** – Paul encourages us to “... live lives worthy of God...” What does God look like in face of opposition. He is not threatened by it. He loves despite it. When opposed he responds with grace and forgiveness and compassion.