

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, September 15, 2021 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

CATCHING CHRISTIAN: A Study of 1 Thessalonians

“Dealing With Opposition” *1 Thessalonians 2:1-20*

- A New Jersey teacher was suspended for giving a student a Bible.
- A football coach was placed on leave for praying on the field.
- The Atlanta fire chief was fired for self-publishing a book defending Christian morality.
- A Marine was court-martialed for refusing to remove a Bible verse on her desk.
- A senator castigated a political nominee for his evangelical theology.
- Christian groups like InterVarsity Christian Fellowship have been expelled from college campuses.

It's hard for Christians not to feel that our culture is increasingly antagonistic toward our faith and values today. Obviously, American Christians should not compare the opposition we face with the persecution being suffered in countries such as North Korea, Somalia, Afghanistan, or Iran and Iraq. But Mary Eberstadt is right, "Something new has snaked its way into the village square: an insidious intolerance for religion that has no place in a country founded on religious freedom."

"For the first time in my life I have an urgency for this country, for the United States, and it has been growing in me these last two years. I believe the pressures that we're seeing in our country now are going to increase, and one of these pressures is going to be hostility toward people who embrace Jesus Christ and his teaching, who are not ashamed to stand for him. My concern is that we're not ready for this pressure. And not being prepared is very, very dangerous on a number of levels. There is a tidal wave on the horizon and it's coming toward us very quickly. It's not some far off threat." –Andrew Brunson, Persecuted Christian Pastor (*held in a Turkish prison and tortured for years before his release and return to America in 2018/2019*)

Brunson goes on to say it may start out as mild persecution at first even as we see today. HE says, "Christian persecution in the U.S. will most likely be done through silencing, shaming, marginalizing, banning of financial transactions, cancellation of website hosting, and removing of tax-exempt status for church. Those who persecute will justify their persecution by saying that we are hate groups, that what we have is a hate message of intolerance."

Matthew 10:16-23 – ¹⁶“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.” ¹⁷But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. ¹⁸You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. ¹⁹But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; ²⁰for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. ²¹“Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. ²²And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. ²³When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.”

Matthew 24:9 – “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake.”

Luke 21:12 – “But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name’s sake.”

John 16:33 – “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

How can you deal with persecution?

- (1) **Realize it’s bound to happen** - Unfortunately, persecution against Christians in the United States is not something that is avoidable. It is something that Christians will have to deal with and understand. Paul said in **2 Timothy 3:12**, “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” And Peter said in **1 Peter 4:12**, “¹²Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you.”
- (2) **React in the proper Biblical way** - The key to coping and dealing with the persecution of Christians and Christianity in the U.S. is our reaction to our persecution. **Jesus said in Matthew 5:39**, “I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.” That is an interesting reaction to persecution for sure. Scripture tell us in **1 Peter 3:9**, “Do not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.” And listen to Paul’s words in **Romans 12:14**, “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.” He goes on to say in **verses 17-21**, “¹⁷Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. ¹⁸If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. ¹⁹Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. ²⁰Therefore ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.’ ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”
- (3) **Respond as Jesus did** - The key to understanding and thriving through the persecution is in reacting as Jesus Christ did. Jesus did not seek revenge on His enemies but rather, He was called to turn the other cheek. When Jesus Christ was on the cross, He prayed for forgiveness for those who put Him there. We can do the same. Jesus said in **Matthew 5:10-12**, “¹⁰Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil

against you falsely for My sake. ¹² Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

★ It's not how we deal with the glorious moments of our life that makes one's faith contagious/catching, 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. **Why? How?** You know, catching! 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 surprise 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 overreact to opposition (v17)**– *"Do not repay (lash back) anyone evil for evil..."* No knee-jerk reaction when you are opposed. Don't respond! Wait!
- (2) **Remain rightly related to God in the face of opposition (v17)**– *"...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 retribution and revenge (v18)**– *"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 (v19)** – *"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 its course. God can handle our opponents better than we can. Can I suggest that we turn them over to God and then pray for them... not against them.

- (5) **Treat your opposition well (v20)-** *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 believer, 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, 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... remember this letter was really written to commend the Thessalonian believers.
- In chapter 2 of 1 Thessalonians 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:

Elements of persecution and opposition that comes against us and how to respond:

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 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 bought 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 charges. (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 is like that today... so contrary to the world's way of thinking that those in the world may not only be offended by it at times, it may even sound like "crazy thinking" to the world... think "turn the other cheek" or "gouge out your eye." 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. They may have been questioning Paul's motives as being "easy believism"

an “anything goes” kind of theology, permissiveness, easy grace – do what you want God will forgive. (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. Paul would later, in his letter to Timothy, even himself warn about those who are just saying what men want to hear or “ticking their ears”... men-pleasers. Paul obviously was not out to please men... he was often displeasing men and getting thrown into prison for it.

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. Go 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 CATCHING CHRISTIAN STRATEGY FOR DEALING WITH OPPOSITION (1 Thess. 2:7-20)

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. **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. **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. **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. **Affirming of others (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.
6. **Adherence to the Word (v.13)**
7. **Patient endurance in suffering (v.14-16)**