

“Universal Opposition to the Gospel”
1 Thessalonians 14-16
(Preached at Trinity, June 16, 2019)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Like in so many other cities, Paul and his companions faced opposition in Thessalonica and were forced to leave. Knowing the hardship the new Thessalonian converts were experiencing Paul was concerned whether they were enduring. Paul was greatly encouraged to hear they were pressing on in faith, hope, and love.
2. They had truly received Christ. Paul comments in **Verse 9 of Chapter 1: 1 Thessalonians 1:9 NAU** - "how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God,"
3. The Thessalonians were a living testimony to the power of the Word of God effectually working upon the heart of sinners. Paul states here in **Verse 13 1 Thessalonians 2:13 NAU** - "For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted *it* not as the word of men, but *for* what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe."
4. One of the signs and evidence of their Christian conversion was their perseverance in the face of persecution. Just as Paul had suffered oppositions in Thessalonica, the Thessalonian Christians were suffering persecution.
1 Thessalonians 1:6 NAU - "You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit,"
1 Thessalonians 2:14 NAU - "you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they *did* from the Jews,"
5. Their new life in Christ had placed them at odds with the rest of their city, neighbors, family members. Where they were previously in harmony, they now found themselves in frequent discord.
6. The life of every Christian will experience this opposition. Such is the history of Christianity, repeated over and over. It is the age-old warfare of the devil against the woman and her seed.
Genesis 3:15 NAU - "And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed"
This warfare is the testimony of the church.
We read Paul’s words in Acts:
Acts 14:22 KJV - "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."
William Hendriksen – “Willingness to suffer for Christ is proof of discipleship. It shows that the word of God is at work in the heart. It unites believers, so that they constitute a true brotherhood to which no one belongs who is not willing thus to suffer. For a true believer not to suffer persecution in some form is impossible.”¹

¹ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of I-II Thessalonians*, New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 3:70.

7. G.K. Beale writes: “When Christians understand that suffering is the “stadium” in which they run the race of faith and that God himself will provide them with the ability to complete the contest, they are motivated better to endure in the race and to thank God in the process.”²
8. In **Verses 14-15** Paul describes the brotherhood of believers in this fallen world and the universal opposition of fallen man to Christ and His kingdom. Remember, there are only two kinds of people upon this earth. Those who love and follow Christ and those who despise Him and deny His right to rule.
- I. Fallen humanity despises Christ and His followers
 "who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out."
- A. Paul describes the universal opposition of fallen humanity
1. The Jews hated God
 Paul describes the three terrible testimonies to their corruption
 - a. They killed Jesus – all of Jerusalem rose up against Christ
Matthew 20:17-18 NAU - "As Jesus was about to go up to Jerusalem, He took the twelve *disciples* aside by themselves, and on the way He said to them, ¹⁸ "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death"
Matthew 27:22 NAU - "Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Crucify Him!"
 - b. They killed the prophets who announced the coming of Christ
Matthew 23:37-38 NAU - "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.
³⁸ "Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!"
Acts 7:51-52 NAU - "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. ⁵² "Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become"
 - c. They oppose the followers of Christ who bear testimony to Him
 "and drove us out."
 2. It wasn't the Jews only who hated Christ. The Gentiles too hate Christ. The Gentiles also took their part in the crucifixion of Christ
Matthew 20:18-19 NAU - "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, ¹⁹ and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him"

² G. K. Beale, *1–2 Thessalonians*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 81–82.

- B. There is universal opposition
1. In this Jews and Gentiles are united. Paul declared this in Ephesians 2
Ephesians 2:1-3 NAU - "And you (the Ephesian Gentiles) were dead in your trespasses and sins, ² in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. ³ Among them we too (Paul and the rest of the Jews) all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest (the rest of humanity)."
 2. The whole world is united with one accord in their hatred and opposition to Christ
Acts 4:27-28 NAU - "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur."
1 Thessalonians 2:14 NAU - "you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they *did* from the Jews,"
 3. The Psalmist described this universal rebellion
Psalm 2:2-3 NAU - "The kings of the earth take their stand And the rulers take counsel together Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, ³ "Let us tear their fetters apart And cast away their cords from us!"
 There is a universal effort of fallen humanity to rid themselves of the reign of Christ.
- C. In great contrast, Paul describes the shared brotherhood of believers
 "For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus"
1. Paul is telling the Gentile Thessalonians that they were enduring the same suffering as their Jewish counterparts
 2. To identify with Jesus Christ puts you in direct conflict with Satan and all of the forces of evil. Satan has you in his sights and has determined to destroy everything in you that identifies with Christ.
 3. We are still a part of this universal brotherhood

- II. The lost man cannot please God
 "They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men"
- A. This is hard for the lost man to accept. It is an eye-opener for many.
1. Most people believe they are essentially good people
 2. Most people sincerely believe they are going to heaven and they believe they have a right to go there. They object any suggestion that they are worthy of hell.
 3. In spite of the fact that fallen man vainly believes that God is pleased with him the truth is fallen humanity cannot please God
 4. Most people truly believe they deserve the blessings of God. They have become so accustomed to God's goodness they see it as an entitlement.
- B. Without faith there is nothing we do that pleases God
Hebrews 11:6 NAU - "And without faith *it is impossible to please him*"
1. Without faith our best actions and greatest works are defiled. Even our good works are sinful.
 2. Our only goodness is that received by faith. Our only righteousness is the righteousness of Christ.
 Matthew Henry wrote: "Those who by faith walk with God in a sinful world are pleasing to him, and he will give them marks of his favour, and put honour upon them."
 3. For the Christian, Jesus Christ is all in all. Our great delight is to reflect His glory. Apart from Him there is nothing but wretchedness.
John 15:5 NAU - "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."
- III. The sins of the lost man are always increasing
 "that they always fill up the measure of their sins."
CSV – "they are always adding to the number of their sins"
Romans 2:5 NAU - "storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath"
- A. In our lost condition our ultimate problem is a corrupt heart
1. We have a sinful nature. We sin by nature. It is as natural for a lost man to sin as it is for a cow to eat grass or a sow to wallow in the mud or an eagle to soar through the sky. We sin by nature.
 2. In our fallen condition, however, our corruption only grows worse and worse.
- B. The hearts of the wicked become harder and harder with each passing day
1. Paul is speaking specifically of the Jews, In their rejection of Christ they were merely continuing the rebellion they had manifested since the wilderness. They were following after their forefathers who had killed the prophets. The hardness of the Jews had only increased.
 2. But this rebellion is universal in scope. All of fallen humanity is continually adding to their sin and thus heaping up the judgment of God. The hardness of their hearts is only increasing.
 John Bunyan gave the terrifying description of the man in the iron cage:
 "I left off to watch and be sober: I laid the reins upon the neck of my lusts; I sinned against the light of the word, and the goodness of God; I have grieved the Spirit, and he is gone; I tempted the devil, and he is come to

- me; I have provoked God to anger, and he has left me: I have so hardened my heart, that I cannot repent.”³
3. Sin always grows and increases. Sin may begin like a small blemish but it continues to grow and consume like gangrene
 - a. The drug addict began with a single day and a bad choice
 - b. The alcoholic began with that first drink
 - c. The adulterer began with that unguarded look and unchecked lusts Sinful fantasies. We can see this with David and Bathsheba.
 4. This should be a warning to the Christian as well. Undisciplined behavior may begin small.
 - A. The Christian life is one of duties and delights.
1 Corinthians 9:27 NAU - "I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified."
 - B. The Christian delights in the things of God. He delights in the Word of God and prayer. He delights in worship. His life is filled with joys unspeakable. We delight in Christ, the object of our faith and source of all comforts and joy.
 - C. But the Christian life is also filled with duties. They are Gospel duties, i.e. duties fueled by our love for Christ.
Hypocrites perform religious duties to convince themselves or others of their righteousness.
The Christian has one chief desire—to please Christ.
 - D. To us they are not mere duties, but they are duties none the less.
We have a duty to obey.
A Christian can become careless and his life will be filled more and more with the desires of the flesh.
- C. Paul says fallen man is filling his storehouse with sin
1. Paul uses a word that refers to filling up to the fullest measure. Paul described storing up wrath unto the day of wrath.
Romans 2:5 NAU - "But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God"
 2. The lost man loves his sin and treasures it away in his storehouse of iniquity.
John 3:19 NAU - "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil."
 3. He vainly speaks of small sins not recognizing that it is a plague that will consume him
 4. Those present at the crucifixion gave little thought as “Crucify Him!” came from their lips.

³ Bunyan, John, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell Publishing), page 27.

IV. The lost are under the wrath of God

"But wrath has come upon them to the utmost."

A. God's wrath is a present reality

Romans 1:18 NAU - "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,"

1 Thessalonians 2:16 - "But wrath has come upon them to the utmost."
(aorist tense signifying a point in time action)

John 3:36 NAU - "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

1. The Jewish nation had filled up the full measure of God's wrath. But nothing is worse than openly opposing Jesus Christ. This should cause us to tremble as we consider the widespread rejection of the Gospel.
Matthew Henry: "Thus did the Jews fill up their sins; and nothing tends more to any person or people's filling up the measure of their sins than opposing the gospel, obstructing the progress of it, and hindering the salvation of precious souls. For the sake of these things *wrath has come upon them to the uttermost*; that is, wrath was determined against them, and would soon overtake them. It was not many years after this that Jerusalem was destroyed, and the Jewish nation cut off by the Romans. Note, When the measure of any man's iniquity is full, and he has sinned to the uttermost, then comes wrath, and that to the uttermost."⁴
2. There are some words that are socially unacceptable today. Among them are sin, accountability, hell, wrath, judgment.
3. The truth is, the wrath of God is already kindled against all who forsake the Gospel of Christ. Fallen man enjoys the goodness and mercy of God and misinterprets it as a token of God's favor—that God is pleased with them. God is *not* pleased.
4. For the lost man one single sin is sufficient to drag him down to hell. But, his problem isn't simply outward sinful actions. His chief problem is his corrupt heart from which flows all manner of corruption.
 - a. With sin oozing from his corrupted heart he continues to heap upon himself the wrath of God
Psalm 7:11-12 – ". . . God is angry *with the wicked* every day. ¹² If he turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready."
 - b. His continued sin causes his heart to become more and more hardened – he becomes more and more wretched

B. The ultimate display of God's wrath is hell

1. Hell is the eternal display of God's wrath
2. On one hand, hell is a great picture of forsakenness, of being totally abandoned by God. But hell is not a place void of God's action, for He will eternally pour His wrath out upon the lost.

⁴ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2340.

3. Those who shut the door to God's presence in this life will have the door to God's presence shut to them in the next life.⁵

Conclusion:

1. Most today deny the concept of sin and any idea of consequence for sin
Few today tremble at the thought of God being angry with them
2. Few believe that the most powerful being in the universe is angry and poised to crush them
3. Most believe that hell is simply inconsistent with the character of a God who is only capable of love. Hell would be much too cruel and violent.
4. The truth is human beings are in a universal state of rebellion against God. They display continued opposition to His rule over them.
And they display continual opposition to those who follow Christ and seek to honor Him with their lives.
5. But they are what we were. Save the grace of God we would still be lost and under God's wrath. We must show pity upon the unredeemed and make sharing the Gospel a high priority.
6. And we must never compromise Christ in order to make ourselves acceptable in their sight. We must not fear their displeasure.
Our duty is to persevere, even in the face of persecution. We must take our place in the brotherhood of precious saints who have patiently endured the opposition of the lost.

⁵ G. K. Beale, *1–2 Thessalonians*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 84.