

## 11. Helping Our Children Prepare for Opposition

In our last topic, we discussed helping our physical and spiritual children learn how to help others develop their foundation for ministry on the Word of God. Today, we will be learning how to help our children prepare for opposition. 2 Timothy 3:12 says, “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” One of the things that we need to help our children understand, is how to prepare for opposition; as they learn to live godly lives, they will experience opposition in their lives.

Paul described the reality of this opposition to the Christians in Thessalonica. In 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16, we read, “For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans, who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.” Although the Christians in Thessalonica had only been Christians for a few months, they were already experiencing suffering at the hands of their countrymen. We want to help our children understand that opposition will come to them for the same reasons that opposition came to the Thessalonian Christians.

First, opposition will come because we are learning to imitate the early church. Acts 4:1-2 tells us why the early church started to experience opposition from the Jews. Those verses say, “Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.” These verses give us two reasons why the early church faced opposition. First, they faced opposition because they taught the people. Satan wants to keep people in ignorance because it is much easier for him to control ignorant people. People who start to learn about Christ begin to ask questions; that threatens leaders who are trying to control people through ignorance.

We also see that the religious leaders were greatly disturbed because the early church was preaching the resurrection of the dead. The message of the resurrection of Christ is the message that Satan hates more than any other message. As a result, there will always be opposition when we preach and teach about the resurrection of Christ. Throughout the past 2000 years, religious leaders of various religions have opposed the message of the resurrection of Christ. Two statements that Christ made help us to understand the reason for this opposition. John 8:32 says, “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” Then John 8:36 adds, “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.” Religion holds people in bondage while Christ came to set people free. The message of the Gospel will set people free, but it will be opposed by false religion.

Second, opposition to Christ by non-Christians will cause us to suffer. The Jews had experienced suffering from their countrymen. The Thessalonians were also suffering from their countrymen. Suffering comes because Christ transforms lives which brings opposition from people who benefit financially from sin. Acts 19:25-27 says, “He called them together with the workers of similar

occupation, and said: ‘Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship.’” When people who benefit from sin and false religion see it affecting their income, they will cause Christians to suffer.

Third, opposition will cause us to experience persecution. We see that suffering will often turn into full persecution against Christ and against Christians. As Paul taught the Christians in the area of Galatia, Acts 14:22 says he was, “Strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, ‘We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.’” Since Paul had been stoned and left for dead in these very cities just a short time earlier, the new Christians realized that they must be ready to experience persecution. Acts 5:41 tells how the early church responded to persecution, “So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.” We want to help our children understand that it is a privilege to suffer and experience persecution for Christ.

Fourth, opposition will come because the world has no desire to please God. Romans 8:7-8 says, “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” Any person without Christ has no desire to please God. In fact, these verses point out that all those without Christ are at enmity against God. In contrast, 1 Thessalonians 2:4 says, “But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.” As we show our children how to please God by the way they walk and talk so that they can be an example to others, we also need to help them understand that the mind of the person without Christ is at enmity against God and cannot please God so will automatically oppose the message of the Gospel.

Fifth, opposition will come because people without Christ do not please God and so are contrary to all people who follow Christ. People without Christ are still living to enjoy the pleasures of sin. In Hebrews 11:24-26, we read, “By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.” Moses recognized that there is pleasure in sin. However, the key that he realized is that those were passing pleasures. Those pleasures will only last for a very short time. Those who are still seeking the passing pleasures of sin cannot understand people who recognize that suffering for Christ is of greater value; so they oppose us.

Sixth, opposition will cause people to try to forbid us to speak about Christ. Satan does not want people to hear about the death and resurrection of Christ and so he will encourage people to try and stop any mention of Christ. Peter and John showed how they handled such opposition. Acts 4:18-20 says, “And they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of

God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” Peter and John said it was impossible for them to keep quiet about Christ.

We see the way that the religious leaders handled the statement of Peter and John. Acts 4:21 says, “So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done.” The next time the apostles were brought before the religious leaders, Acts 5:28-29 reads, “Saying, ‘Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!’ But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: ‘We ought to obey God rather than men.’” The apostles did not try to argue with the religious leaders. They just told them that it was more important to obey God than man and calmly accepted the beating that was given to them in Acts 5:40.

Seventh, opposition will come because Satan does not want to see people saved. The goal of Satan will never change. Christ described that goal when He said in John 10:10, “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” The goal of Satan will always be to steal, to kill and to destroy. He does not want to see any person receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life. He certainly does not want anyone to experience abundant life. As a result, he will always stir up opposition to Christians that are faithfully sharing the Gospel with others.

Eighth, opposition will come because there are many people who want to pile up their sins to the maximum limit. Romans 1:18-31 tells how mankind turned away from God and turned to self-worship and sin. After describing in detail the attitudes that control many people in verses eighteen through thirty-one, Romans 1:32 says, “Who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.” Here, we see that many people want to commit the maximum amount of sin possible. They also take pleasure in those who do the same. Such people will always oppose true Christians because they feel that Christians prevent them from committing all of the sins that they desire to commit.

We have just looked at eight reasons from 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 why Christians will experience opposition. Once our children can help other Christians understand that opposition will certainly come, we want to show them how to prepare to respond to that opposition. We want to model by our example the words of Acts 5:41-42 where we read, “So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.” It is a privilege to be counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you equip your children to understand this great privilege to have the opportunity to suffer shame for the name of Christ.