



NG Study Guide: 1 Th. 2:13-20 "Be Built-up" 9.23.18

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. *Leader note: Please review the brief instructions for leaders at the bottom.*

The Study

Thesis: God has given us the Bible to reveal Himself, His plan of redemption, His moral perfection, and His eternal faithful love. God uses His word to transform us, and to prepare us for persecution and spiritual opposition. We need to discover the effective work of God's word, and be transformed and prepared.

1. God's word transforms [13]

For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

Paul was constantly grateful to God for the Thessalonians salvation and their response to the word of God. As Paul had presented the gospel and New Testament teaching they received it not as the word of men, but what it truly is the word of God. We recently completed an apologetics series where we looked for several weeks at the evidence that the Bible is in fact the word of God, and not merely ideas of men; and that the Bible has not been changed through the millennia. The Bible reveals truth about God, eternity, spiritual life, morality and ethics. The Bible *also effectively works in you who believe*. Those who believe and receive the word are transformed. The word of God and the Spirit of God renew our minds so that we are not conformed to the values and philosophies of a culture opposed to God. As we learn the word, and yield to it we are transformed to reflect Jesus, and our lives reveal the good and acceptable and perfect will of God [Rom. 12:1-2]. The effective work of God's word includes: revealing sin, promoting repentance, discovering identity in Christ, fostering love, hope, faith, peace, worship and adoration of God, and preparing perseverance in difficult circumstances and with difficult people.

2. God's word prepares for persecution [14-16]

¹⁴ *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, ¹⁵ 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, ¹⁶ 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.*

The Thessalonian believers had experienced persecution from their fellow countrymen for abandoning the Greco-Roman gods, and adopting not only a new faith, but different values and culture that reflected the morality and worship of God [14]. They were not alone in their experience of persecution. The early church in Judea (the southern area of Israel) was primarily Jews who had recognized Jesus as Messiah, and recognized the fulfillment of God's promise of a New Testament [Jer. 31:31-34]. These Jewish believers were persecuted by fellow Jews because of their faith in Christ [14]. The persecuted Thessalonians were in good company as even God's prophets, and the Lord Jesus had been opposed to their deaths [15].

Paul empathized since he had been repeatedly persecuted [15]. The Jews who were opposing Paul and the gospel believed that Gentiles (non-Jews) needed to become Jews to be saved. Because they rejected Jesus as Messiah,

they continued to view salvation with an improper understanding of the Old Testament, and no understanding of the gospel and the New Testament. These Jewish opponents thought they were pleasing God [15] but they weren't. In fact, they were contrary to God and to all men - Jew and Gentile [16]. Paul encouraged the Thessalonians that God would avenge, and the persecutors would experience the extent of God's wrath [16]. Their wrongs were severe and so would their punishment be (unless they repented of their persecution and received Christ had Paul had done [1 Tim 1:12-16]).

Despite the persecution, the Thessalonians did not waiver in their faith.

Christians are persecuted in over 50 countries, and an estimated 10,000 are killed for their faith annually. Millions of Jesus' followers are persecuted annually (Voice of The Martyrs).

We are likely to experience increased resistance, opposition, and hostility for our faith in a culture that is increasingly post-modern and in many respects post-Christian. Growing in your understanding of God's word prepares you to remain strong and not waiver in your faith as you encounter persecution. "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" [2Tim. 3:12]. If we are living as committed followers of Jesus our lives are going to be in conflict with the prevailing values and morals of the culture we live in.

3. God's word prepares for spiritual opposition [17-20]

¹⁷ But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire. ¹⁸ Therefore we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us. ¹⁹ For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? ²⁰ For you are our glory and joy.

Paul wanted them to know that he wanted to be there personally to encourage them. Even though he wasn't in Thessalonica, his heart was with them and he loved them and cared for them [17]. He wanted them to know the reason that he had not come to them wasn't because of indifference, but despite repeated efforts to go they were hindered by Satan [18]. Paul understood the reality of spiritual opposition to the gospel [Eph. 6:10-18], and even though he was only in Thessalonica for a few months or less he had made sure that these new followers of Jesus understood about spiritual opposition as part of growing as Jesus' disciples. So that when they read his letter that "Satan hindered us" they didn't have some caricature image of a pointed tail, horns, and pitchfork. But understood that Lucifer was a created angelic being, an archangel, who led a rebellion against God along with one-third of the angels, and they were cast out of heaven [Rev. 12]. And since that time, he has been an adversary to God's people or Satan. Satan is not an equal with God. As a consequence of man's rebellion in the Garden of Eden [Gen. 3], God has allowed Satan, to whatever extent God chooses to limit him and the fallen angels aligned with him, to hinder and oppose mankind and the gospel.

In considering spiritual opposition, we want to avoid the dangers of assuming that every hardship is spiritual, and neglecting to consider whether opposition may be spiritually inspired. Paul was discerning and recognized that he was hindered time and again, because Satan was seeking to keep him from encouraging the Thessalonians. As a result of the hindrance Paul couldn't come to them and needed to write instead. And as previously noted this is likely Paul's earliest letter that is part of the New Testament [NT]. Following this letter, we see that Paul wrote many letters to various churches that are now part of the NT. What Satan meant to hinder the gospel, God used to advance the gospel. And Paul did in fact later return to Thessalonica and neighboring churches on his third missionary journey [Ac. 20:1-5].

Study Guide Qs

1. How is God using Bible learning to transform you?

2. Do you think opposition will increase, decrease or remain the same in the next 20 years? Describe some opposition that you've experienced as a follower of Christ.

3. Have you ever sensed that you were experiencing spiritual opposition? Describe the experience(s).

4. Why do you think that learning the Bible will better prepare believers for persecution and spiritual opposition?

“Digging Deeper” (optional or alternative study)

1. To learn about persecution of Christians and how you can help through prayer and other ways visit the Voice of The Martyrs at <https://vom.com.au/idop/>.

2. Here is a link to a good resource on the subject of spiritual opposition: [The Invisible War: What Every Believer Needs to Know about Satan, Demons, and Spiritual Warfare by Chip Ingram](#).

Love your neighbor *outside* the group better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors where they live, work, study, or play this past week?
2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor outside the group?
3. Here is a neighboring idea(s) for us to consider for the week(s) ahead:

Consider serving as a group. For example, our NG recently “adopted” a missionary family from our church that is serving in Siegen, Germany (the Snyders). And our NG will serve together at the “Monthly Meal” ministry that provides meals to those in need in our community. If you are looking for ideas, please don’t hesitate to contact us.

Love your neighbor *inside* the group better:

1. Are there some needs in our group that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor within the group?
2. What might we do about that need to help?

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don’t force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Leader Notes:

- 1. Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.
- 2. Feel free to pre-select the discussion questions that you want to focus on** in case there isn’t enough time to answer them all.
- 3. The “Digging Deeper” section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities.** As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the “Digging Deeper” section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.
- 4. Every time you meet consider asking:**

a. What about this passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing? If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.