



# *Confronted*

A person's response to the gospel defines his or her future.

## 1 THESSALONIANS 2:13-20

We can find all kinds of predictions about the future. Some predictions portray the glass as half-full, while others see it as half-empty. The factors pointed to seem to change overnight, which gives birth to more predictions. The only thing that seems to be certain is the uncertainty. But there is one thing we can know for sure: God created each of us as eternal beings with an eternal destination beyond this life. And that eternal future hinges on one question: What are you going to do with Jesus?

**Do you tend to view the future as half-empty or half-full? What is something you wish you could know about the future right now?**

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# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## 1 THESSALONIANS 2:13-20

God had given Paul an open door into Greece, but this new opportunity did not come without struggle. The apostle's work in Philippi led to physical abuse and imprisonment (Acts 16:6-40). The trouble followed him to Thessalonica. There, Jews, upset with Paul's message, tried to turn Gentile leaders against him (17:5-9).

Paul spent three Sabbaths sharing the gospel with Jews in the Thessalonian synagogue (17:2-3). If his later work in Athens is any indication, he probably preached to Gentiles in public settings during the week (17:17).

Paul's work in Thessalonica produced results (1 Thess. 2:2). The new congregation had become a powerful force for the kingdom in relatively short order. They imitated the apostle's commitment to the gospel despite persecution (1:6). The church was having an impact on their native Macedonia and the neighboring region of Achaia. Paul was confident that the entire world would eventually see the Thessalonians as examples of genuine faith (1:7-8).

Paul's ministry in Thessalonica was successful because he stood firm against the opposition he faced. But it also grew because of his attitude toward the people. Instead of taking advantage of them, Paul provided a balance of boldness and compassion. Like a mother, he embraced the Thessalonians with tender care (2:7-8); like a father, he challenged and encouraged them (2:11-12).

Paul was grateful for the Thessalonians' positive response to the gospel but knew others were rejecting the message. Certain Jews were walking a dangerous spiritual path toward God's wrath (2:13-16). He knew their choices would determine their eternal destiny. In contrast, the apostle urged the Thessalonians to continue toward spiritual maturity until he could be with them again (2:17-20).

**Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13-20, noting the contrast between those who accept Jesus and those who reject Him. What noted contrast is the most striking and why?**

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# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## RECEIVED (1 THESS. 2:13-14)

<sup>13</sup> This is why we constantly thank God, because when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you welcomed it not as a human message, but as it truly is, the word of God, which also works effectively in you who believe. <sup>14</sup> For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God's churches in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, since you have also suffered the same things from people of your own country, just as they did from the Jews

### VERSE 13

Paul said that the trio of missionaries were **constantly** thanking God for the church at Thessalonica. Paul, Timothy, and Silas were not patting one another on the back for their teaching ability or ability to meet the needs of those within the church. They did, however, thank God over and over for allowing them to represent Him there.

Paul said of the Thessalonians that they **received the word of God**. The word *received* shows a personal action taken. It means they personally embraced the message that was presented. A study of this word also shows their receiving of God's Word was a continuing occurrence. The church knew that this message defined their future. Therefore, they kept returning to it on a regular basis.

Not only did they receive the message, but they **welcomed it** as the message of God. They readily accepted it because they knew it was God's Word and not a human message.

As the Thessalonians responded and accepted the message, they submitted to what was being taught. The result of their submission was the word of God working **effectively** in them. The verb translated **works** means to engage in a continual activity, to use one's energy and resources on a continual basis. God's Word was at work in the lives of those who believed, changing them from the inside out. This effective work of the Word of God transforming people was true then, and it is true today.

**How does accepting the gospel message make it possible for the Word of God to be lived out in a person’s life?**

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**VERSE 14**

More evidence that these believers had accepted and been changed by the message was that they **became imitators of God’s churches**. Earlier in the letter, Paul mentioned how the Thessalonians had imitated his example as a follower of Christ (1 Thess. 1:6). They also became imitators of God’s churches. Paul and other Christian leaders had helped establish churches throughout the Roman Empire, and the Thessalonians leaned into their common beliefs and practices.

The congregations **in Judea** were primarily Jewish and had been planted by the early believers in Jerusalem after Pentecost. These Jewish Christians shared one important common experience with the Gentile believers in Thessalonica. They all had **suffered** for their faith. (See Acts 7:54–8:1; 12:1-2.) Likewise, the Thessalonians had faced opposition from their own people.

**People of your own country** could refer to any resident of Thessalonica. The Thessalonian believers likely experienced problems from both Jews and Gentiles. The exact nature of the persecutors was not as important to Paul as the faithfulness of Christians standing in harm’s way and enduring various degrees of rejection and isolation.

The Thessalonian believers probably did not know about the Judean suffering firsthand, but Paul was emphasizing that such oppression was a part of the Christian life. He was thankful that opposition did not stop the gospel in either Judea or Macedonia. Instead, believers in both locations demonstrated boldness and continued their work for the kingdom.

**What criteria should be considered when determining who should be viewed as a model?**

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**BIBLE SKILL:** *Read a passage to gain context of a related text.*

Review Acts 17:1-15. Note the response of the people in Thessalonica to the gospel message. How do the actions described in Acts 17 mirror the descriptions found in 1 Thessalonians 2:13-20? How might these past experiences have impacted how Paul addressed the believers in his letter to them?

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**REJECTED** (1 THESS. 2:15-16)

<sup>15</sup> **who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and persecuted us. They displease God and are hostile to everyone,** <sup>16</sup> **by keeping us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. As a result, they are constantly filling up their sins to the limit, and wrath has overtaken them at last.**

**VERSE 15**

While the church began with Jewish converts, including Paul, many Jews rejected the gospel. This caused the apostle anguish, even to the point that he told the Romans that he would be willing to sacrifice his own salvation if his “flesh and blood” would embrace their promised Messiah (Rom. 9:1-3).

Anyone who rejects the gospel stands against God. But in these verses, Paul specifically reflected on his people’s history. For instance, the Jews had ***killed the Lord Jesus***. While Romans carried out the crucifixion, Jewish leaders instigated the execution. Paul wasn’t labeling every Jew as an enemy of the church. Instead, he was focusing on particular groups of Jews who were actively opposing

the gospel and the work of God’s missionaries. As noted above, Paul longed for the Jews to accept Jesus as their true Messiah, and he was living proof that no Jew was beyond God’s reach.

The opponents of the gospel were **hostile to everyone**. In this, Paul highlighted the universal availability of the gospel. By hindering the spread of the gospel, these individuals were making it harder for all people to hear God’s message. They were not only becoming enemies of God, but they also were acting like enemies to all people.

**How does rejecting the gospel message make a person hostile toward others?**

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**VERSE 16**

The Jewish opponents of the gospel were against the sharing of God’s Word. Paul said that those who rejected God’s message were **keeping** them **from speaking to the Gentiles**. The word *keeping* shows a continual action; this was not a one-time thing. When Paul and his cohorts were active in sharing God’s message, this group was active in opposing them.

Another characteristic of this group was that God’s **wrath** was upon them, so much so that it had **overtaken them**. God is loving and just. This is clearly seen in the message of the cross. He loves humanity enough to send His only Son to take on the punishment due us for our sin. If His message of salvation is rejected, then His wrath is experienced.

Those who reject the gospel message have not experienced the freedom that is found in the gospel. Many are openly and consistently hostile to the people of God, the things of God, and the message of God. This was true when Paul penned this letter, and it is true today.

**How does the opposition to the gospel faced then compare to the opposition faced today?**

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## KEY DOCTRINE: *Last Things*

The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in heaven with the Lord. (See John 14:1-3; 1 Thess. 4:16-17.)

### FOCUSED (1 THESS. 2:17-20)

<sup>17</sup> But as for us, brothers and sisters, after we were forced to leave you for a short time (in person, not in heart), we greatly desired and made every effort to return and see you face to face. <sup>18</sup> So we wanted to come to you — even I, Paul, time and again — but Satan hindered us. <sup>19</sup> For who is our hope or joy or crown of boasting in the presence of our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? <sup>20</sup> Indeed you are our glory and joy!

### VERSES 17-18

The evidence that Paul, Timothy, and Silas experienced significant opposition from those who rejected the message is indisputable. The question becomes, how did they manage to finish the task to which they were called? The simple answer is that they stayed focused on their calling, because they knew that a person's eternal destiny hinged on his or her response to the gospel.

Those who rejected the gospel message had managed to run Paul, Timothy, and Silas out of town. The three missionaries had been ***forced to leave*** Thessalonica. The Greek wording indicates something being violently torn away, abandoned, or even orphaned. This separation, even for a short time, was painful for the missionaries and for the Thessalonian congregation. Their change of location, however, did not change the bond the missionaries had with this group of believers. Persecution and strife might be able to separate a group physically, but it cannot and need not stop a group from praying for one another and staying connected spiritually.

The missionaries also stayed focused in spite of attacks from ***Satan***. The apostle said that Satan ***hindered*** them. Satan personally stood in opposition to the work Paul and his cohorts tried to accomplish.



It would be wise for God’s people today to recognize that we face a real enemy. It would also be wise for God’s people to know that God has given us a battle plan to face our enemy. James addressed the scattered and persecuted church: “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you” (Jas. 4:7-8). If we know how to fight our enemy, we are much more apt to be able to stay focused.

***Paul and his coworkers maintained an eternal perspective.***

**VERSES 19-20**

Paul and his coworkers maintained an eternal perspective. The apostle never tried to downplay the persecution taking place. But he knew the persecution was temporary. He was focused on the return of Christ, and he was leading the church to have this same focus.

Paul’s *hope, joy, and boasting* were centered on the pending celebration between him and the Thessalonian church at the return of Jesus. Verse 19 was penned in such a fashion to show that Paul knew Christ was going to return, and he knew that his brothers and sisters in Christ would be in the celebration with him. Paul was able to stay focused because he knew this was not the end. The end would only come upon the return of Jesus, and this end would mark the beginning of an eternal celebration.

The Thessalonians were Paul’s *glory and joy*. He was incredibly grateful for the way the Thessalonians were living out their Christian faith each day, and he wanted them to know that his absence did not mean he had forgotten them. They were still connected to one another by Christ because they had chosen to connect to Christ through the gospel.

**How does focusing on eternity help a believer endure challenges experienced because of a faith in Jesus?**

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# APPLY THE TEXT

- People who receive the gospel message become imitators of Jesus.
- Rejecting Christ earns a person God’s wrath.
- Focusing on those who accept the gospel motivates believers to continue sharing.

**Examine your life for evidence you are following Jesus. Ask God to demonstrate His character through you in a greater degree in the week ahead.**

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**Who is someone you know who is currently choosing to reject the gospel? Stop right now and pray for him or her. If you do not know anyone, ask God to place someone in your path that needs Jesus so that you can share the gospel with them.**

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**Discuss how the three missionaries and the church at Thessalonica were focused on Christ’s return. What steps can your group take this week to focus more on Christ’s return?**

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## PRAYER NEEDS

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