1Thess #35

Being a true Christian usually means being unpopular in the world.

We will open back up today in 1Thessalonians chapter two.

Let us keep Deacon Jason K. in prayer. His mother-in-law went home to be with LORD recently and he has surgery right around the corner.

I want to make a quick announcement related to Bible Conferences. I am still strongly interested in having a yearly Central Florida Bible Conference, it simply has been a matter of financial concerns that has held me back.

The issue of finances being in the right position to do this needs to be manageable not only for PRB Ministry, but others who will have to fly and rent cars and hotels to stay for a weekend conference.

I do have a positive Bel in Texas who is in prayer about possibly doing a Bible Conference there in the future.

His name is Rob and he is close to the San Antonio area of Texas so if anyone is near there and interested in supporting a Bible Conference there let me know in the near future.

We all need to pray and be prepared financially for these types of events because they take time, effort and finances to pull off properly.

Now we are back in 1Thess chapter two and reading how grateful the Apostle Paul is, for the positive group of Greek Bels spreading the gospel of Christ in Thessalonica.

1Thes 2:13 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 *mere* men, but as what it really is, the word of God, which also is at work in you who believe.

These were genuine converts into Christianity.

Because the norms and standards and ideologies they once agreed with were now replaced with BD.

People can talk about Christianity and claim to love the LORD, but their lifestyle reflects something different. To be a new creature in Christ, means that which the world agrees with and that which emanates from human viewpoint is not part of your norms and standards or ideology any longer.

True Christianity is about becoming more Christ-like over time, not fitting into the popular ideology of the day.

/[1Th 2:14](https://www.blueletterbible.org/nasb20/1th/2/14/s_1113014) For you, brothers *and sisters,* **became imitators** of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for **you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen**, even as they *did* from the Jews,\

The first group to make a huge impact were from Judea and they basically went against the Sanhedrin.

They kept promoting and following Jesus Christ and assisting the Apostles.

This brought great attacks verbally, physically and financially upon the Jewish followers in Judea.

[1Th 2:15](https://www.blueletterbible.org/nasb20/1th/2/15/s_1113015) who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all people,

[1Th 2:16](https://www.blueletterbible.org/nasb20/1th/2/16/s_1113016) hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always reach the limit of their sins. But wrath has come upon them fully.

/Those who followed Jesus in HIS earthly ministry first stood against the Sanhedrin. Then it was the Roman government who took notice. After the resurrection, ascension and session of Christ, the communities everywhere began to shift for or against the early formation of the church. Sightings or witnesses of HIS miracles and resurrection were spread rapidly and by large crowds of valid witnesses.\

This was no different for the Greek culture who had their own gods, philosophies and beliefs and now found that their communities had developing Christian churches in their midst.

Jump over to the book of Acts we will first look at chapter seven and we will touch into chapter 8 as well.

The birth of the Church of Jesus Christ was not a small unrecognizable ripple, it became a huge problem for almost every culture it spread into.

Even the term church which was adapted and used by the Lord and the Apostles sparked frustration from religious crowds.

The term church - was something that meant a group called out or singled out, a body of people or governing group of individuals.

/Church- is the ancient Greek word *ekklesia*; it was not a specifically religious word. Christians passed over many Greek words that were commonly used for religious brotherhoods and settled on that which TLJC used when addressing the Apostles before HE was crucified (Mat 16:18). This meant a special group of called out ones, a body of unity or community assembly under one set of beliefs.\

The Church of Jesus Christ was never established as a denomination to try and rule other religious systems. It was designed as a group of positive Bels who wanted to get closer to Christ and share the message and love of Jesus Christ to others.

One of the first documented deacons of the early church was a Bel named Stephen.

He did not go out looking for trouble yet in his preaching and spreading the gospel, word got back to the Sanhedrin the high priest joined into the ruckus crowd and called Stephen out publicly.

Stephen being put on the spot publicly did not run or hide. Stephen stood his ground and spoke the truth.

/Act 7:51 “**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, and **you have now become betrayers and murderers of Him**;\

Stephen calls them out on facts.

That the nation of Israel was given all opportunities to recognize the Messiah and instead they rejected HIM and hung HIM on a cross.

Remember - a lie can travel the world twice before the truth even has a chance to put its pants on!

Truth always marches forward at its own pace.

[Act 7:53](https://www.blueletterbible.org/nasb20/act/7/53/s_1025053) you who received the Law as ordained by angels, and *yet* did not keep it.”

Stephen was not speaking out in arrogance - simply facts and truth, which at times all BELS will be challenged to do.

/Act 7:54 Now when they heard this, they were **infuriated**, and they began **gnashing their teeth** at him.

Jesus described Hell as a place of *weeping and gnashing of teeth,* it is related to great visible frustration or despair.\

It is a place where the mind is driven to a breaking point, it is related to arrogance being pushed to its full limit.

It was an ancient saying when someone is driven crazy. It was taken from an ancient Hebrew references of arrogance or pride being openly frustrated.

When truth cannot be disproven this is often the result. Bels are called to reach a level of SM where they can defend that which they claim to believe.

The question is are you prepared to be ridiculed and become unpopular?

/[Act 7:55](https://www.blueletterbible.org/nasb20/act/7/55/s_1025055) But he, **being full of the Holy Spirit,** looked intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God;

Stephen was filled by the HS, he was walking in HIS Christ-like nature.\

Stephen was called to stand strong in this historic moment he was not doing something from his own pride, or flesh.

[Act 7:56](https://www.blueletterbible.org/nasb20/act/7/56/s_1025056) and he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

/[Act 7:57](https://www.blueletterbible.org/nasb20/act/7/57/s_1025057) But **they shouted** with loud voices, and **covered their ears** and **rushed at him** with one mind.

The truth of BD can flip the insane switch even amongst the intellectual crowd! They first will argue (vocal), then they shut down (ignore) and then they will attack.\

There are very few Christians today who can compare to the persecution and attacks of the early church.

You have a handful of countries or regions that still imprison or find ways to humiliate or even attack Christians – North Korea, Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and certain parts of Libya and Somalia come to mind.

But to openly stone Christians, beat them and imprison them for no other reason except their faith in Christ it is hard to compare to two thousand years ago after the Cross of Christ.

The formation of the early churches that took place over that 30 year span covered in the book of ACTS was a volatile time for followers of TLJC.

We have Christians today who think they are persecuted because someone in their circle of family and friends won’t talk to them anymore. Or they are mistreated on their job for their beliefs.

[Act 7:58](https://www.blueletterbible.org/nasb20/act/7/58/s_1025058) When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning *him;* and the witnesses laid aside their cloaks at the feet of a young man named Saul.

The interesting principle was it was often the intellectual crowd who began the verbal assault.

Then they allowed the lower class or less intellectual to get whipped up into frenzy so as to physically attack!

It is believed Saul of Tarsus was brought up here because the writer of ACTS (Dr. Luke) was instructed by his best friend, the Apostle Paul to mention his presence.

Because Paul was the instigator of just such attacks to the early Christian population.

[Act 7:59](https://www.blueletterbible.org/nasb20/act/7/59/s_1025059) They *went on* stoningStephen as he called on *the Lord* and said, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!”

The crowd was whipped up and it became a mob attack.

[Act 7:60](https://www.blueletterbible.org/nasb20/act/7/60/s_1025060) Then he fell on his knees and cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them!” Having said this, he fell asleep.

The Bel never dies, their body goes to sleep yet their spirit is called to be with TLJC.

Stephen never lost his filling power of God the HS which was amazing on its own. Much less standing there accepting this awful death.

/Act 8:1 Now **Saul approved of putting Stephen to death**. And on that day a **great persecution began** against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except for the apostles.

*Syneudokeō –* heartily approved or joined together with the crowd, to applaud and agree or be alongside.\

SOON-OH-DA-KAYO, means to join with something or someone to share in a joyful event.

Most historians that know who Saul was and what he agreed to do for the Sanhedrin agree he instigated this event.

[Act 8:2 Some devout men buried](https://www.blueletterbible.org/nasb20/act/8/2/s_1026002) Stephen, and mourned loudly for him.

/[Act 8:3](https://www.blueletterbible.org/nasb20/act/8/3/s_1026003) But **Saul *began* ravaging the church,** entering house after house; and **he would drag away** men and women and put them in prison.

The Greek present tense, tells us Saul was doing this repetitively over the course of many months.\

Some historians claim Saul had been on the Christian warpath for nearly 3 years before TLJC knocked him down and blinded him.

He was believed to be the same age as Jesus.

His mission to squash Christianity probably began during the last year of our Lord’s earthly ministry.

The Greek verb for ravage is – *lymainō,* (LOU-MINE-O), it meant to cause destruction to leave in ruins, to bring pain with humiliation. Saul of Tarsus was good at this type of destruction and humiliation.

The Apostle Paul never hid from his past failures and who he was prior to his conversion. He did not allow the past to hold him back but Paul remember where he came from.

/1Tim 1:13 even though **I was previously a blasphemer** and **a persecutor** and a **violent aggressor**. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief;

1Cor 15:9 For I am the least of the apostles, and **not fit to be called an apostle**, because **I persecuted the church of God**. \

It is healthy to let go of your past failure, yet never lose sight of who you were and how far GOD has brought you along.

/1Tim 1:15 It is **a trustworthy statement**, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among **whom I am foremost**.

The Apostle Paul knew no matter who he was teaching (liar, murderer, adulterer) they could be brought into the saving light of Jesus Christ just like him! \

There is nothing you can do or no one who cannot be saved. Even used by GOD in incredible fashion if they are willing to let go of the world and human viewpoint and cling unto Christ.

The Apostle Paul knew real persecution, because he was a chief persecutor!

/[1Th 2:14](https://www.blueletterbible.org/nasb20/1th/2/14/s_1113014) For you, brothers *and sisters,* **became imitators** of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for **you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen**, even as they *did* from the Jews,

Paul understood persecution because he was a chief antagonist and leader of the persecutors against Christians.\

All Christians will face adversity, attacks or distractions, it is part of your calling to pick up your own cross.

Unfortunately, most of the attacks or opposition will come from those in your circle of family, friends and close workmates.

/Bels need not seek out opposition because if they are growing toward SM it will begin to surface in and around their life. The growing Bel can no longer reconcile cosmic viewpoint with BD therefore change is inevitable. The growing Bel will certainly have points of attacks or moments of discomfort in relation to the people they communicate with regularly. God wants us to be strong enough to stand in truth while still offering Agape’ (impersonal, unconditional love) to those who disagree with BD.\

This is nearly impossible if emotions are running the show – you have to be able to reach maturity and stand strong in what you know is true.

While standing strong in your faith, can you still bring forth the gospel and speak truth to those who now realize you do hold the same viewpoint?

Especially if you have now made some lifestyle changes that back up what you believe?

Opposition is not a call to battle every time.

/Opposition is sometimes, simply an opportunity to speak the gospel. Attacks are not always a call to strike back, sometimes it is a doorway to speak the truth of BD. To remain calm and walking in the New Nature under verbal assault is a wonderful training ground to face other adversities. Anger, strife or being highly defensive do not make precision tools for soul winning. Just as going along, to get along, does not achieve any spiritual victory. People are drawn to truth and strength – that only comes from a real relationship with GOD.\

Have the strength to realize being a real Christian is not a popularity contest.

In fact it will probably make you much less popular than you use to be with many people.

Philp 4:13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Deu 31:6 Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.

Isa 40:31 But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.