

Today... we live in (what is described as) a “cancel culture.” Have you heard of it...? People are empowered by social media to enact vengeance... in order to hurt people and companies whose views don't seem to fit (an ever-changing) popular narrative.

Cancel culture (also called “call-out culture”) is a modern form of ostracism... in which someone is thrust out of social or professional circles – whether it be online... on social media... or their career. Those who are subject to this ostracism are said to be "cancelled". ... Here is how the online Merriam Webster Dictionary defines “Cancel Culture.”

*Cancel culture refers to the mass withdrawal of support from public figures or celebrities who have done things that aren't socially accepted today. This practice of "canceling" or mass shaming often occurs on social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook.*

— Demetria Slyt (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cancel%20culture>)

A few (out of the many) recent examples of it include:

**Gina Carano** — The “Mandalorian” actress was fired by Disney after posting on social media that being a Republican in 2021 was similar to being Jewish during Nazi Germany. Her Hollywood agent dropped her, and Hasbro scrapped her “Star Wars” action figures.

**Mike Lindell** — The CEO of My Pillow said his company was ditched by nearly 20 retailers after he publicly questioned the electoral results of the 2020 presidential election and made his election fraud claims into a movie. Lindell is an unwavering supporter of former President Donald Trump and visited him in the White House on Jan. 15 — five days before Mr. Trump left office.

**Goya Foods** — Liberals called for a Goya Foods’ boycott after the company’s chief executive Robert Unanue praised Mr. Trump at an event at the White House. Mr. Unanue said Mr. Trump’s leadership was a “blessing” for Hispanic Americans.

(Now here is something that I would like for you to remember... in just a moment... when we get to today's passage of Scripture...) ... According to Keith Hampton... professor of media studies at Michigan State University... the practice contributes to the polarization of American society... but it does ***not*** lead to changes in opinion.

Did you catch that...? It does NOT lead to a change in opinion. ... It only affects ***external*** behavior... but not internal belief. Some students are afraid to express themselves fully... if they hold unpopular ideas... because they are afraid of being called out on social media... they keep their belief but they avoid asking questions in their classes... as a result. ... Call-out culture's prevalence is making marginalized groups feel "*even more hesitant to speak out for what they feel is right.*"

Cancel Culture was born out of a desire to control... as people have limited power... according to Lisa Nakamura (another professor from the University of Michigan, media studies.) It leads to self-policing of perceived "wrong opinions."

The Cancel Culture is rapidly growing and has much of the conservative media's watchful eye. ... Freedom of speech that we have enjoyed – as an American Ideal... is getting kicked to the curb... and is being stomped to death.

Does anyone here believe that we are NOT seeing the foundation being laid for a coming wave of persecution for Christians in America...? Our views do NOT fit the popular narrative on things like creationism... human sexuality... and Jesus' claims that He is the ONLY way to Heaven. ... It will be regarded as "hate speech" to quote John 14:6 – "*I am the way, the*

*truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” ...*  
Proclaiming that truth in public today is likely to bring you much scorn.  
“How **dare** you say that yours is the only legitimate truth!” Or try  
proclaiming what the Bible says about keeping sexually pure.

O.K. So here’s the good news! You may be ready for some good news  
right about now... and here it is: History reveals that some of the greatest  
growth spurts in the church have occurred during the most challenging  
times. ... Faith often flourishes during moments of intense persecution.  
This was true as far back as the days of the early church... when a great  
persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem (read Acts 8:1–8).  
The disciples continued to preach Christ as they fled... and as a result the  
gospel spread to places such as Samaria and beyond.

Every era in church history show that Christianity always GREW when the  
church was persecuted. ... And it is not just history that shows this. We  
see it happening today.

Every **DAY**... 13 Christians worldwide are killed because of their faith.  
And every day... 12 Christians are unjustly arrested or imprisoned...  
and another five are abducted. ... So reports the 2021 World Watch List  
(WWL). ... David Curry (president of Open Doors) says:

*You might think the [list] is all about oppression. ... But the [list] is  
really all about resilience. The numbers of God’s people who are  
suffering should mean the Church is dying—that Christians are  
keeping quiet, losing their faith, and turning away from one another.  
But that’s not what’s happening. Instead, in living color, we see the  
words of God recorded in the prophet Isaiah: “I will make a way in the  
wilderness and rivers in the desert” (Isa. 43:19, ESV).*

His organization reports that in 2021 there are **309 million Christians** living in places with very high or extreme levels of persecution. (BUT GET THIS!) That number is UP - by **49 million** from last year's list.

... [ P A U S E ] ...

Most of you probably agree with me that wide-spread persecution of Christians is coming to America. And when it comes... we can expect what has happened all through history... and what we see happening in the world today. ... Those professors from Michigan State University are right! External force does not change internal belief. And I would add... that when that belief concerns the truth about Christ... external force seems to spread it.

This was exactly what happened in Thessalonica (as we will see in today's passage.) ... People were coming to faith in Christ amidst severe persecution... and remaining steadfast. ... And what makes me so excited to preach today's passage... is that it tells us **HOW THEY DID IT**. We are about to learn how we can hold up... under (what so many of us believe) - is coming. ... There are two things we need. ... I urge you to take careful notes. ... **#1. Is GOD'S WORD WITHIN US**.

### **1 Thes 2:13**

When Paul and Silas had preached... the people had recognized the words as being more than human ideas... and they had accepted the gospel message as the very word of God. ...

How do you receive the Word of God? ... Do you receive it as the Word of God? ... Please consider something with me for just a moment...

In the early dawn of time... God only had to say: “*Light, **be!***” - and light **was!** ... (Such is the power of God’s Word.) ... He had only to **speak**... and a hundred billion galaxies sprang into being. ... He had only to **speak**... and life arose and multiplied itself in a **billion** forms. ... He had only to **speak**... and the seas swarmed with life... and the hills clothed themselves with meadows and forests. ... When the Word was made flesh... one word from Him... and demons fled... leprosy vanished... and the dead arose.

That is the energy and effectiveness contained in His Word. AND all of that **omnipotent power** also resides in His **written** word - like the explosive force that lies in a stick of dynamite. ... So let me ask again: *Do you receive it that way...?*

It has the power to penetrate our thoughts... move our hearts... quicken our consciences... and conquer our wills. ... Now consider **this** with me... (Hebrews 4:12)... but I am going to break it up and explain what it is saying.

**Hebrews 4:12 (ESV)**

*<sup>12</sup> For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

“For the word of God is ‘zao’ (alive) and ‘ener-gays’ (powerful, energetic, possessed of strength from within) and sharper than any two-edged sword...” ... (Now stop there!) ... Anyone who has ever carved the Thanksgiving turkey knows that they want the sharpest cutting instrument available to them. Cutting between the joint and marrow is extremely difficult. It is hard to separate the joint from the marrow of the turkey... so you can remove the leg (for example) from the carcass.

The author of Hebrews chose a great example (separating joint from marrow) to describe what the word of God does inside of us. It is like a sharp sword... or knife. It also separates something that is very difficult – if we don't have the right tool. And the Bible is that tool.

Each of us has a soul (which is the seat of our own thoughts)... and as believers... we have a spirit that has been made alive. Our spirit is where God communicates His thoughts to us. But often it is hard for us to distinguish between our own thoughts... and whatever God may be communicating to us. We need to separate thinking that originates in our soul... from that which God is communicating to us in our spirit.

The author of Hebrews is saying that God will use His word inside of us... to penetrate our thoughts... and make it clear what His thoughts are.

The way you and I will hold up under persecution... is by having God's word within us. Paul indicates that the Thessalonians did three things as they received God's word. They appreciated it... They appropriated it... and they applied it.

They appreciated it by understanding it... as what it was. It is the same word that spoke worlds into existence. But they also appropriated it.

Paul used two different words in the same verse (1 Thes 2:13)... to convey the idea of hearing – or receiving. The first word (in the Greek) is “*para-labontes*.” It is minimal “hearing”... “hearing of the ear”... while the second Greek word (“*ed-exaus-they*”) means “hearing of the heart”... it is an inward embracing (or welcoming.)

So Paul wrote: “when you heard the word of God with your ears... you heard it in your heart as the word of God. (They internalized it... They

welcomed it. They appropriated it. They took it into their inner man and made it part of their lives.)

You know... Jesus repeatedly warned His listeners about the wrong kind of hearing:

**Matthew 13:9 (ESV)**

*<sup>9</sup> He who has ears, let him hear.”*

**Mark 4:24 (ESV)**

*<sup>24</sup> And he said to them, “Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you.*

**Luke 8:18 (ESV)**

*<sup>18</sup> Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away.”*

In other words... “Be careful to listen properly...” “Listen ‘ed-exaus-they!’” ... Jesus seems to repeat what Amos wrote in Amos 8:11 – that one day people who are careless listeners to God’s Word will be hungry due to a famine “for hearing the Words of the Lord.” ... As in many other countries and periods of church history – such a famine (here) is not out of the question. “Listen ‘ed-exaus-they!’” Welcome God’s Word into your heart and make it part of your life.

The Thessalonians appreciated God’s word for what it is... and they appropriated it. ... How do we appropriate the Word? ... By understanding it and receiving it into our hearts... and by meditating on it so that it becomes part of the inner man. ... (LISTEN!) Meditation is to the spiritual life - what digestion is to the physical life. ... If you did not digest your food... you would die. ... (Now... I know) that it takes time to meditate... but it is the only way to appropriate the Word and grow.

The third thing that the Thessalonians did... we see through the rest of the letter that Paul wrote to them. They applied the Word. The Word went to work in their lives. ... It is not enough to appreciate the Bible... or even to appropriate the Bible. ... We must apply the Word in our lives and be doers of the Word (as James 1:19–25 says).

It has well been said: “God’s commandments are God’s enablements.” (Did you catch that...? “*God’s commandments are God’s enablements.*” ... (Think about it!) Jesus commanded the crippled man to stretch out his hand — the very thing the man could not do. ... Yet that word of command gave him the power to obey. He trusted the word... obeyed... and was made whole (Mark 3:1–5). ... When we believe God’s Word and obey... He releases power — divine energy — that works in our lives to fulfill His purposes.

Look closely at the last phrase of 1 Thes 2:13 again... “*is at work in you...*”

**1 Thessalonians 2:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> *And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is **at work in you** believers.*

The verb rendered “is at work” (ἐνεργέω) is almost always used in the New Testament to denote some form of supernatural activity. In every case it refers to a force that is not human. Here it draws attention to the fact that the power manifested in the lives of the converts is not of this world... but divine. ... Where the word of God is welcomed with obedient faith... there the power of God... is at work.



From our passage today... we are seeing how the Thessalonians were able to hold-up under persecution. We want to gain insight for how we might do the same... if persecution comes to us.

**#1. Is having GOD'S WORD WITHIN US.**

**#2. Is having GOD'S PEOPLE AROUND US.**

### **1 Thes 2:14-16**

Willingness to suffer for Christ is proof of discipleship. ... It shows that the word of God is at work in the heart. ... And here is an effect of suffering... that we should consider. It unites believers... so that they constitute a true brotherhood... to which no one belongs who does not suffer in the same way. ... Suffering draws together and holds together." Suffering is a cement that holds believers together.

Here is J Vernon McGee on the matter:

*I do believe that if suffering came to the church, it would draw believers together. We would cut out all this nonsense of picking at the other fellow. We would recognize that every child of God is our brother. There may be some disagreement on various points, but every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is my brother. We are in the family of God, and we would mirror this before the world.*

Here is why having God's people around us is so vital for handling persecution. ... You have probably seen this to be true in your experience... that suffering people can become very self-centered and think that they are the only ones going through the furnace. ... Well... The Thessalonians were not *alone* in their suffering. ... They had abundant and worthy company. ... Their persecutors had killed the Lord Jesus Himself and the Old Testament prophets. The persecuted the churches in and

around Jerusalem. (The Apostle Paul did a lot of that... before Christ got hold of Him.) Now they drove the Apostle Paul himself out (their father in the faith... and his fellow missionaries.)

When it comes to suffering for the cause of Christ – thinking that we are the only one going through the furnace - is one of the worst things we can do. ... One of the strongest helps when facing persecution... is to look to the example of others who have stood strong against opposition. ... This is what the Thessalonian believers did: they followed the example of the Judaeen churches.

Perhaps your family has disowned you because of your faith... or perhaps you have been bypassed for a promotion at work - because you are a Christian... Friends may no longer be your friends ... These experiences hurt... but they are not ours alone. ... Other Christians are going through the same trials... and many... in other parts of the world... face much greater difficulty. You might want to stop at the back table as you exit today and pick up a copy of the Voice of the Martyrs magazine. Jodi has been putting several copies back there. ... Pray for those who are suffering around the world... take heart and learn from them.

Here is one of the great values of the local church: we stand together in times of difficulty and encourage one another. ... It was when Elijah isolated himself from the other faithful Israelites... that he became discouraged and wanted to quit. ... A lonely saint is very vulnerable to the attacks of Satan. ... We need each other in the battles of life.

... [ P A U S E ] ...

In Paul's letters... we find that he generally stays **positive** when speaking of his fellow Jews... as he desires them to come to faith in Christ. ... Yet... you probably noticed *how in this passage* (however)... he directs **harsh criticism** at them... But we need to realize that Paul is not condemning the entire Jewish race (as many have wrongfully taken this passage – and done – themselves - what they thought Paul was doing here.) Paul's harshness is not cause for anti-Semitism. We are not to see the entire Jewish race as "Christ-killers." No. The 1<sup>st</sup> Century leaders of Israel **did** call for the death of Jesus... but it would be wrong for us to condemn all Jews.

They are still God's beloved people and He will restore them to Himself at the end of the Tribulation. But with respect to the Jews Paul wrote about... the old story never seemed to change. It was being repeated over and over - the story of rebellion against God. Constantly in times past... their spirit of obstinacy had revealed itself. It did so in their wilderness-journey from Egypt to Canaan... during the period of the judges... during the reigns of several kings - just before the Babylonian Captivity. ... During the ministry of Christ it was prevalent... and in the period immediately following this... it had risen to a climax. That is why Paul wrote in verse 16... "so **as always** to fill up the measure of their sins."

And then Paul wrote at the end of verse 16...

**1 Thessalonians 2:16 (ESV)**

*<sup>16</sup> by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. **But wrath has come upon them at last!***

In one sense... judgment had already fallen on Israel. At the time of Paul's writing... they were a scattered people... and their nation in Palestine was under Roman rule. ... But in just a few short years... an even greater judgment was to fall in the future. In A.D. 70... the Roman armies besieged Jerusalem... destroyed the city - and the temple (which has never been rebuilt) and disintegrated Israel as a Nation until 1948.

Most likely Paul was using language conveying the “*dramatic present*.” He was talking about the future - as though it had already happened... in order to make a point. ... Because of their continual rejection of Jesus as the Messiah... the coming 7 year tribulation will be particularly focused on them... bringing them to repentance. ... [ P A U S E ] ...

From our passage today... we have been harvesting insight from the Thessalonians... for how we might hold-up under persecution. Whether or not we experience wide scale persecution against Christians (like so many countries face today) we do know this... If we are living Godly lives in Christ Jesus... we will suffer for His sake.

### **2 Timothy 3:12 (ESV)**

*<sup>12</sup> Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,*

Whether it comes from our ever-increasing hostile culture... or from individual personal situations... we need to be prepared. ... [ P A U S E ]

Years ago... when we first moved to Central Oregon... I learned a new term about winter driving. Anyone who has lived through one of our winters has probably done this at some point. It is called “peep-hole driving.”

It happens when you're in a hurry to get home... or to work. But a significant snow fall has occurred... and your car is encased in a layer of

snow and ice. ... You start the car... fire-up the heater and defroster... and then you reach around to the back seat and pull out a scraper for your windshield. It becomes a battle to clear the hardened ice from restricting your view. After a few minutes... you have only cleared away an opening the size of a frisbee. But now you are shivering and miserable. It's obvious that it is going to take several more torturous minutes. ... So what do you do...? You go to the back window and scrape off and even narrower opening... and then you throw caution to the wind... get into the car... and drive away.

You drive really slow... craning your neck as close as you can to the windshield for a better view. You are peep-hole driving... putting hope against hope that you can see everything that you will need to see. ... As your heater and defroster eventually melt away enough ice so that you can see better – that is when you make a very startling discovery. Everyone else around you is also peep-hole driving!

Now... please don't think that by my talking about this... that I am saying it is OK to do. I am not! Peep hole driving is an invitation to disaster!

But here is why I am talking about it. Peep hole driving is an apt picture of what it is like to go through your Christian life with the limited vision of knowing how to hold-up under persecution. This kind of limited vision is also an invitation to disaster!

**#1. Make sure GOD'S WORD IS WITHIN YOU.**

**#2. Make sure GOD'S PEOPLE ARE AROUND YOU.**