



December 6, 2015

Ezra 4

Ever Changing, Never Changing Part 5

“Expect Some Opposition”

Pastor Gary Hamrick

In life, we can expect some opposition. People will not always like us or treat us fairly, especially if we are taking a stand for truth and living a life that honors God. So how does a Christian respond to opposition? Pastor Gary shares five principles for dealing with opposition in our personal lives and he also shares examples of opposition in our personal lives and he also shares examples of opposition that Cornerstone Chapel has faced rewarding the church’s building project.

Historical Background

1. The enemies of the Jews embarked on a non-military, three-point plan of opposition to the rebuilding of the Temple.
 - a. They tried to infiltrate the ranks of the Jews by indicating that they desired to help in the rebuilding in order to sabotage the project.
 - b. They tried to frustrate the work by hiring legal counsel and using legal maneuverings to delay the project.
 - c. They tried to intimidate the Jews with fear.

2. Who were the enemies of the Jews?
 - a. About 185 years prior to this timeframe, the Assyrians ¹ came and besieged the ten tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel, and dispersed the people, in addition to deporting some of the Jews to Assyria.
 - b. Unlike the Babylonians, who besieged the southern kingdom of Judah, the Assyrians imported their people to live in the land.

¹ The Assyrians occupied what is modern-day Iran and Iraq.

- c. The Assyrians believed that by intermarrying with the Jews, they could repatriate the new territory, which would make the people more allegiant to the Assyrian empire.
 - d. The descendants of the Assyrians and the Jews settled in Samaria, and are known as Samaritans in the New Testament.
 - e. The Jews in Jesus' day considered the Samaritans to be half-breeds and there was long-standing hostility between them.
 - i. The Jews wanted nothing to do with Samaritans, and they believed the Samaritans had no claim to anything connected to the Jews, because they were of mixed blood (Assyrian pagans and Jews).
 - ii. The Samaritans, however, believed they were part of the Jewish people, and they embraced some of the tenets of Judaism.
 - 1. They believed in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
 - 2. The Samaritans only accepted the first five books of the Old Testament as being the Word of God.
 - 3. They believed in Moses, but they rejected the rest of the prophets and the remaining books of the Old Testament.
 - 4. They celebrated Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) and the Passover, but they rejected the rest of the Feasts.
 - iii. In Jesus' day, the Samaritan population was approximately several hundred thousand in the region of Israel.
 - iv. Today, there are fewer than 500 Samaritans, all of whom live primarily on the West Bank.
3. Kings mentioned in the book of Ezra include:
- a. Cyrus was the king who allowed the Jews to leave Babylon and return to Jerusalem.
 - b. Xerxes, Cyrus's son, replaced his father.
 - c. Artaxerxes replaced his brother, Xerxes.
 - d. Darius was the king of Persia.
4. After the Samaritans were "lawyered-up," they expressed their concerns in a letter that was sent to Artaxerxes, and in the letter they asked for a temporary restraining order to stop the building project.
- a. [Ezra 4:5](#) - *"They hired counselors to work against them and frustrate their plans during the entire reign of Cyrus king of Persia and down to the reign of Darius king of Persia."*
5. Artaxerxes agreed to their request, and he issued an order for the Jews to stop the rebuilding of the Temple.
- a. [Ezra 4:23-24](#) - *"As soon as the copy of the letter of King Artaxerxes was read to Rehum and Shimshai the secretary and their associates, they*

- went immediately to the Jews in Jerusalem and compelled them by force to stop. Thus the work on the house of God in Jerusalem came to a standstill until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.”*
- b. Pastor Gary said the building project was delayed for approximately 15 years!
 - c. It wasn't until the prophets Haggai and Zechariah came on the scene that the building project was restarted.
6. When the Jews started the rebuilding project again, the Samaritans sent a letter to King Darius, who did his due diligence to find out if in fact there was a restraining order to stop the work.
 7. King Darius found the original order that permitted the Jews to rebuild the Temple, and he not only ordered the Samaritans to stop hassling the Jews, he also ordered them to help them get the project completed!
 - a. [Ezra 6:11-12](#) - *“Furthermore, I decree that if anyone changes this edict, a beam is to be pulled from his house and he is to be lifted up and impaled on it. And for this crime his house is to be made a pile of rubble. May God, who has caused his Name to dwell there, overthrow any king or people who lifts a hand to change this decree or to destroy this temple in Jerusalem. I Darius have decreed it. Let it be carried out with diligence.”*

We Should Expect Some Opposition

8. When individuals or the church make a stand for the Lord, truth, and the Word of God, they should expect opposition.
9. Pastor Gary estimated that because of all the “legal wrangling,” Cornerstone Chapel lost about three to four years in the building process.
10. Pastor Gary estimated that approximately 90% of the online comments posted on the *Leesburg Today* and *Loudoun Times Mirror* websites were in opposition to the Making Him Known project.
11. Pastor Gary shared four comments that were posted online in the *Leesburg Today* newspaper, regarding the Making Him Known building project.
 - a. “Leesburg Citizen: The Town can't play nice with Cornerstone, which is a money generating behemoth. Make them pay for their fair share of road improvements! Traffic generated by this monstrosity will not be confined to Sundays as they want to expand services and classes to every day of the week. This is also one of the ‘out there’ churches/schools that insist

the Earth is only 6,000 years old, science is fraudulent, and Adam had pet dinosaurs. Be careful Town Council, be very, very careful.”²

- i. Cornerstone Chapel has no plans to conduct classes every day of the week.
- ii. Cornerstone Chapel believes in the biblical account of a young earth, which is 6,000 to 10,000 years old.
- iii. Cornerstone Chapel is not in opposition to science, because a lot of science validates what the Bible teaches, however, the church does disagree with scientific theory when it conflicts with Scripture.
 1. Pastor Gary said, “The Theory of Evolution, for example, basically in a nutshell, is that man and random chance is the center of the universe.”
 2. Cornerstone Chapel believes that the Bible teaches God and intentional design are at the center of the universe.
- b. “Paperboy: As a Christian, I find this church, and its attempts at expansion, disturbing. This church will avoid paying a dime to our town, and the traffic around this location will be horrendous. Are they going to pay for police traffic control on Sundays? As long as they cease telling others how ‘wrong’ we are in our biblical interpretation, and keep their abhorrence of science to themselves, they can build their new monstrosity. Oh btw, hugging, kissing, even holding hands in public is outright hellspawn. Nice place, indeed.”³
 - i. Cornerstone Chapel does, in fact, pay for Loudoun County Sheriff’s Department and Leesburg Police Department officers to assist with traffic on Miller Drive and Sycolin Road.
 - ii. Pastor Gary said Cornerstone Chapel gave the Town of Leesburg two acres of church property when the Town wanted to widen Sycolin Road, otherwise the Town would have had to go through the process of condemning the land and paying the church!
 - iii. Cornerstone Chapel paid \$26,000.00 for a traffic signal.
 - iv. Cornerstone Chapel, upon occupancy in the fall of 2016, will pay \$14,000.00 for fire and rescue services.
 - v. Cornerstone Chapel paid \$400,000.00 for the construction of turn lanes on Battlefield Parkway and sidewalks on Tolbert Lane.
 - vi. At the Town of Leesburg’s request, Cornerstone Chapel agreed to pay \$200,000.00 for stone retaining walls to be constructed around the retention pond (at the corner of Battlefield Parkway and Sycolin Road), in order to mirror the exterior walls of the church.

² http://www.leesburgtoday.com/news/vote-on-cornerstone-chapel-expected-tonight/article_4b504508-78be-5108-adcd-15a83cc1b2e4.html#user-comment-area

³ http://www.leesburgtoday.com/news/cornerstone-members-rejoice-council-approves-church-project/article_8ad5d76f-54f1-56f2-bd1f-4dbb4f66d062.html#user-comment-area

- c. “John _____: Memo to Town Council; vote no. We don’t need this behemoth in the neighborhood and I’m not thrilled at their lack of paying their fair share for roads. Put it this way, I won’t support any council member that votes in favor of this project.”⁴
- i. Before the building project began, Cornerstone Chapel paid taxes on all of the church property that could not be documented as church use, which was basically everything except for the picnic area.
 - ii. Pastor Gary reminded us that when it comes to the benefit a church has in the community, a lot of what the church does is intangible, but in the last five years, Cornerstone Chapel has given approximately \$170,000.00 to benevolent needs in the Leesburg community.
 - iii. When consideration is given to all of the financial blessings Cornerstone Chapel has given away in the last five years (local outreach and missions) the total is \$11,000.00 short of \$4 million dollars!
- d. “ms1234: The Town REQUESTS that the church contribute \$\$ for transportation? REQUESTS? Are you kidding? Oh & how generous the church is to build a turn lane. The Town Council really should grow a backbone. For once, I hope WHEN the developer, Long Lane Associates, sues, they win – big time. Perhaps, the council is afraid god or some other non-existent being is going to strike them down. LOL Idiots.”⁵
- i. Long Lane Associates did sue Cornerstone Chapel and the Town of Leesburg, and lost the case when the Supreme Court of Virginia overturned the lower court ruling.

When People Oppose You - Principle #1

12. **Romans 8:31** - *“If God is for us, who can be against us?”*

13. As long as your motives are pure and your actions honor God, then it doesn’t really matter what other people may think.

When People Oppose You - Principle #2

14. **Matthew 5:39** - *“But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.”*

⁴ http://www.leesburgtoday.com/news/commission-endorses-cornerstone-church-project/article_92dc476e-6a81-5558-803b-b54c4f26c675.html#user-comment-area

⁵ http://www.leesburgtoday.com/news/cornerstone-members-rejoice-council-approves-church-project/article_8ad5d76f-54f1-56f2-bd1f-4dbb4f66d062.html#user-comment-area

15. Don't retaliate when people oppose you. You can object and you can address it with them, just don't take revenge.

When People Oppose You - Principle #3

16. **Matthew 5:44** - *"Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you..."*
17. Pray for those who oppose you or mistreat you.

When People Oppose You - Principle #4

18. **Genesis 50:20** - *"[Joseph said,] You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."*
19. View opposition as an opportunity, and remember that God can bring unexpected good out of undesirable situations.

When People Oppose You - Principle #5

20. **Proverbs 25:21-22** - *"If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you."*
- a. **Psalms 140:10** - *"Let burning coals fall upon them; may they be thrown into the fire, into miry pits, never to rise."*
 - b. The idea is that burning coals is a statement of the Lord's judgment.
 - c. We are not supposed to even the score; we are to get out of the way and leave it up to the Lord take the appropriate action(s).
21. Your kindness makes room for God's justice, and you will be rewarded.

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read **Ezra 4:1-5** to provide the foundation for this study.

3. How would you respond to a Mormon, Jehovah's Witness, or Muslim, who says: "We worship the God"?
4. Read and discuss [1 Peter 3:15](#).
5. Provide an overview for discussing the four online comments Pastor Gary quoted, and the factual responses he provided regarding the financial contributions the church has made to the community, the Town of Leesburg, etc. (See #11 above)
6. If someone in the "opposition party" approaches you, how should you respond?
7. Read and discuss each of the five principles and the related Scriptures. (See #12 through #21 above)
8. Close your time in prayer as the Holy Spirit leads.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).