

“Dealing with Accusations”
1 Thessalonians 2:1-6
(Preached at Trinity, May 12, 2019)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As I pointed out last time, in the opening verses of **Chapter 2** there are two elements set before us.
 - A. First, Paul is continuing to hold before us the frequent opposition to the Gospel.
1 Thessalonians 2:2 NAU - "but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition."
In city after city Paul faced open hostility, sometimes putting his very life in peril. But, despite the great and fearsome opposition, Paul was continuing to boldly proclaim the Gospel. He gives three reasons for his boldness
 1. The greatness of God – “We had the boldness in our God”
 2. Confidence in the power of the Gospel –
“to speak to you the gospel of God”
 3. The call of God upon him as a minister of the Gospel –
1 Thessalonians 2:4 NAU - "just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak"
 - B. The second thing we see here is one of the tactics used by the enemies of the Gospel. Besides the frequent physical attacks, Paul often faced personal attacks; attacks upon his character and integrity. The opponents of the Gospel knew that if they could convince people that Paul was a false teacher unworthy of receiving, they could discredit the Gospel.
In these verses Paul is defending himself against those seeking to harm and discredit his good name and reputation.
2. This morning I want us to consider this important subject—the subject of dealing with false accusations. It is important for us to understand the Biblical teaching on the subject.
 - A. When we are falsely maligned our flesh immediately goes into defense mode. We want to cry out loudly. We may want to retaliate.
 - B. Most often it is best to trust our lives into the hand of the all-sovereign God we serve. It isn't always necessary to seek to heal our wounded pride.
 - C. But sometimes it is prudent to defend ourselves, especially if the Gospel is at stake.
This is what we are seeing in this passage. Paul's adversaries were calling into question Paul's integrity. They were accusing him of using the Gospel for personal gain from a motivation of greed. They were accusing him of pride and vain-glory. They were accusing him of teaching false doctrine.

Paul declares firmly:

1 Thessalonians 2:5-6 NAU - "we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed-- God is witness-- ⁶ nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority."

3. This is a subject I want us to consider. None of us have been immune from personal attacks designed to malign our character.
4. We must never forget the source of all false accusations. The ultimate source is Satan.
 - A. Jesus described the devil as the father of lies
John 8:44 NAU - "He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*, for he is a liar and the father of lies."
 - B. He is cunning, deceitful and he hates the body of Christ. He can appear to be quite righteous as he sows his seeds of deceit.
2 Corinthians 11:13-15 NAU - "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵ Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds."
 - C. He is the most proud being ever created. Most false accusations stem from pride or hurt pride that is on the attack. This is why pastors must not be immature.
1 Timothy 3:6 NAU - "not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil."
 - D. Satan is our adversary. He accuses the saints of God with endless accusations. He stirs up human adversaries.
Ephesians 6:11-12 NAU - "Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*."
 - E. The church is admonished to beware of these sowers of discord
Titus 3:10-11 - "Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, ¹¹ knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned."
 - F. When individuals attack with lies or half-truths with the goal of harming the brethren we must not fail to understand the source.
5. Pastors are particularly vulnerable because they publicly represent Christ whom the world despises. Paul was experiencing these accusations because he was an apostle of Christ. There is something people find satisfying about finding some fault in a pastor. In our generation, an accusation is the same thing as a conviction. People are quick to receive accusations as truth without regard for evidence. The Bible provides a safeguard:
1 Timothy 5:19-22 NAU - "Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. ²⁰ Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful *of sinning*. ²¹ I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of *His* chosen angels, to maintain these *principles* without bias, doing nothing in a *spirit of partiality*. ²² Do not lay hands upon anyone *too* hastily and thereby share *responsibility* for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin."

- A. The context of these verses focus upon protecting pastors who have a good reputation.
- 1 Timothy 5:17 NAU** - "The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching."
- a. These are elders who are recognized in contrast with those who do not do as well. These are elders who have labored well.
 - b. I've seen men who've served faithfully for years maligned and accused.
 - c. Calvin writes: "none are more exposed to slanders and insults than godly teachers. This comes not only from the difficulty of their duties, which are so great that sometimes they sink under them, or stagger and halt or take a false step, so that wicked men find many occasions of finding fault with them; but added to that, even when they do all their duties correctly and commit not even the smallest error, they never avoid a thousand criticisms. It is indeed a trick of Satan to estrange men from their ministers so as gradually to bring their teaching into contempt. In this way not only is wrong done to innocent people whose reputation is undeservedly injured, but the authority of God's holy teaching is diminished."¹
- B. Paul says accusations should not be received, should not be entertained unless they bear the burden of indisputable evidence. God requires the same standard that He requires in all cases of justice. There must be proof.
- C. The phrase "do not lay hands too hastily" means do not lay a hand upon them with out proper evidence.
David said regarding Saul: "The LORD forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the LORD'S anointed"
- D. Philip Ryken writing on the 1 Timothy passage: "The wisdom of this command is self-evident, especially in these scandalous times. In recent decades American politics has been dominated by scandal, often of the "he-said, she-said" variety. In many cases it proves impossible to know the truth, yet the accusations themselves generate no end of gossip. The same thing can happen in the church. A church member stirs up trouble by slandering one of the elders, either publicly or privately. Even if the charge ultimately proves to be unfounded, the man's reputation will be tarnished. This is why every elder should be presumed innocent until he gets a fair hearing. As John Stott wisely observes, "Adherence to this biblical principle would have silenced many a malicious talebearer and saved many pastors from unjust criticism and unnecessary suffering."²

¹ Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*, eds. Richard D. Phillips, Daniel M. Doriani, and Philip Graham Ryken, Reformed Expository Commentary, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 226–227.

² Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*, eds. Richard D. Phillips, Daniel M. Doriani, and Philip Graham Ryken, Reformed Expository Commentary, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 226.

4. There are some important principles regarding accusations. They may seem strange in our generation.
This morning I'm going to set some of these principles before you and then next week we'll look more at the specifics of Paul's situation.
- A. When the accusation does not involve you it is best to ignore it. Man in his pride thinks he should inject himself into every affair and make his opinion known, especially in the internet age. Not everything concerns you.
 - B. God has given two jurisdictions for dealing with offenses—civil and ecclesiastical. As an individual, your duty is to pray for the accused. You do not have the right to involve yourself in every offense. If it affects you personally, you are to follow the instruction of Matthew 18 and go to them privately. If it is a matter that affects our church, we are to follow the Biblical principles of discipline. We are not to make the accusation a matter of public discourse.
5. **E. J. Young**, Old Testament professor at Westminster Seminary at Philadelphia gave some wise counsel over 40 years ago: "People are willing to believe the falsehood rather than the truth, and this is the way that Satan fights. Here is a good practical rule for us as Christians: when somebody says something derogatory to you about someone else, just forget it. Do not believe it. It may be true; it may not be true. Whatever you do, do not spread it; do not repeat it. Gossip is a terrible thing. At times I think it one of the worst of sins. You can destroy a person's character by gossip, and Satan delights in that. This gossip simply eats the bones of another person and destroys him. It is easy to spread derogatory stories about a minister who is contending for the truth, because they take hold and they do a great deal of harm. You may for a time effectively stifle his witness, but if that man is contending for the truth earnestly, remember that the truth has a way of coming to the fore sooner or later. It is wonderful how God defends those who are on his side. Truth will prevail in the end. We must help those who are defending the truth by refusing to believe the stories that Satan spreads about them."³
6. If it is your good name that is being slandered, remember, you don't always need to defend yourself against every accusation or slander. If you are being insulted for the cause of Christ, rejoice.
Matthew 5:11-12 NAU - "Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. ¹² "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

³ Young, E.J., *In The Beginning*, (Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976) Pages 98-99; 100-101.

7. **Jonathan Edwards**, almost 300 years ago gave some excellent words of counsel in his book, *Charity and its Fruits*.
- A. First, he describes the nature of the offense of slander:
 “Some injure others in their good name, by reproaching or speaking evil of them behind their backs. No injury is more common, and no iniquity more frequent or base, than this. Other ways of injury are abundant, but the amount of injury by evil-speaking of this kind, is beyond account. Some injure others by making or spreading false reports about them, and so cruelly slandering them. Others, without saying that which is directly false, greatly misrepresent things, picturing out everything respecting their neighbors in the worst colors, exaggerating their faults, and setting them forth as far greater than they really are, always speaking of them in an unfair and unjust manner. A great deal of injury is done among neighbors by thus uncharitably judging one another, and putting injurious and evil constructions on one another’s words and actions.”⁴
- B. Edwards then give us counsel regarding our response to personal slander, particularly in light of the charge to Christians to be longsuffering:
1. “Injuries should be borne, where we are called to suffer them, not only without manifesting an evil and revengeful spirit in our words and actions, but also without such a spirit in the heart. We should not only control our passions when we are injured, and refrain from giving vent to outward revenge, but the injury should be borne without the spirit of revenge in the heart.”⁵
 2. “When the injuries we suffer are allowed to disturb our calmness of mind, and put us into an excitement and tumult, then we cease to bear them in the true spirit of long-suffering. Christians ought still to keep the calmness and serenity of their minds undisturbed, whatever injuries they may suffer.”⁶
 3. “Not that all endeavors in men to defend and right themselves, when they are injured by others, are censurable, or that they should suffer all the injuries that their enemies please to bring upon them. But in many, and probably in most cases, men ought to suffer long first.”⁷
7. There are some cases when it is prudent for us to respond. This is particularly true when there is a threat to the Gospel and the cause of Christ. There are times when it is prudent for a pastor to defend himself, not necessarily for selfish vindication but to protect the work of the ministry from being maligned.
 This is the place where Paul continually found himself. His apostolic office was frequently challenged, and Paul was forced to reinforce his credentials. We see this in Galatians.
Galatians 1:1 NAU - "Paul, an apostle (not *sent* from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead),"

⁴ Edwards, Jonathan. *Charity and its Fruits: Christian Love as Manifested in the Heart and Life* (p. 46). Trumpet Press. Kindle Edition.

⁵ Ibid., Page 49.

⁶ Ibid., Page 50.

⁷ Ibid.

Conclusion:

1. It takes great wisdom and forbearance to know when it is best to patiently bear the attack and when it is wise to respond.
2. You may experience accusations and criticism from a family member, in the context of your employment, through social media.
You don't always need to respond. We need to trust that the Judge of all the earth is able to protect, defend, and vindicate His beloved children.