

“Dealing with Accusations – Part 2”
1 Thessalonians 2:1-6
(Preached at Trinity, May 19, 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. In these opening verses of **Chapter 2** Paul describes opposition of two sorts. First, Paul describes the typical opposition he faced as he traveled from city to city. There were threats to his life and limb. He was stoned, beaten, and imprisoned. Paul continued to advance the Gospel with boldness.
1 Thessalonians 2:2 NAU - "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."
 2. But there was opposition of another sort. Besides the physical attacks, Paul was dealing with personal attacks upon his character and integrity. The opponents of the Gospel knew that if they could convince people that Paul was of questionable character they could discredit the Gospel.
In these verses Paul is defending himself against those seeking to harm and slander his good name and reputation.
 3. This is an important subject that we began to look at last week and will continue this morning. How are we to deal with false accusations and slander?
 - A. We’ve all been there. Perhaps you’ve heard about gossip that has criticized and maligned a decision you made. Perhaps someone is questioning your competency at work. Perhaps someone is circulating a lie about you.
 - B. When we are falsely maligned our flesh immediately goes into defensive mode. We want to defend ourselves forcibly. We may be tempted to retaliate.
 - C. As I pointed out last week, 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.
 4. Pastors are often the objects of criticism and slander and unrealistic expectations. Calvin wrote: “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

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.

5. One important element of counsel is for us to avoid empowering the slanderers.
- A. Slanderers are not to be tolerated in a local church.
Titus 3:10 ESV - "As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him,"
- B. We need to guard ourselves from receiving their slander, or worse, spreading the slander about others.
E. J. Young 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."²
- C. **Charles Spurgeon** wrote: "You cannot stop people's tongues, and therefore the best thing is to stop your ears and never mind what is spoken. There is a world of idle chit-chat abroad, and he who takes note of it will have enough to do. Tacitus describes a wise man as saying to one that railed at him, 'You are lord of your tongue, but I am master of my ears—you may say what you please, but I will only hear what I choose.'³
- D. And we must be prudent in our response to criticisms, slander, and accusations. We must endure their slander with a spirit of longsuffering, waiting upon God to come to our defense. Often, responding to false accusations gives the slanderer power he does not deserve.
Carl Trueman writes – "This raises the question of whether one should respond to individual blog attacks. My advice is no, never, not under any circumstances. . . . As soon as one responds, the attacker grows parasitically stronger, gaining an audience and a credibility previously denied him. And the victim has lost because he has taken the rant of some nutjob seriously enough to acknowledge it; he has granted it a status which it simply does not merit in and of itself; and in his efforts to refute it, he has perversely made it important, given it a constituency it did not possess."⁴
- E. **Spurgeon** again: "Your silent endurance disappoints malice and gives you a partial victory, which God in his care of you will soon turn to complete deliverance. Only abstain from fighting your own battles, and in nine cases out of ten your accusers will gain nothing by their malevolence but chagrin for themselves and contempt from others. To prosecute the slanderer is very seldom wise."⁵

² Young, E.J., *In The Beginning*, (Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976) Pages 98-99; 100-101.

³ C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, (Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, 2008) Page 394.

⁴ Carl Trueman, Article: [Thank God for Bandit Country](#), June, 2009.

⁵ Spurgeon, *Lectures*, Page 408.

6. But sometimes it is prudent to defend ourselves, especially if the Gospel is at stake. Sometimes, saying nothing will place a permanent mark upon your character.
Spurgeon: “When distinct, definite, public charges are made against a man he is bound to answer them, and answer them in the clearest and most open manner. To decline all investigation is in such a case practically to plead guilty. Under mere worry and annoyance it is by far the best to be altogether passive, but when the matter assumes more serious proportions, and our accuser defied us to a defense, we are bound to meet his charges with honest statements of fact.”⁶
7. This is what we are seeing in this passage.
 Although, we are not given specific details, these opening verses of **Chapter 2** imply that Paul’s adversaries were attempting to discredit his ministry among the Thessalonians by attacking his integrity.
- A. The accusations were mainly along two fronts. They were attacking the truth of his message and they were attacking his life—the sincerity of his motivations. Paul’s adversaries were calling into question his 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.
- B. Paul knew that leaving these matters unaddressed would undermine the effectiveness of the Gospel and of the future of his ministry.
 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."
8. This morning I want us to examine Paul’s defense of his ministry against the hateful accusations being levied against him. He focused on several areas to defend his reputation among the Thessalonians.
- I. Paul calls attention to the truthfulness of his doctrine
1 Thessalonians 2:3-4 NAU - "For our exhortation does not *come* from error or impurity or by way of deceit; ⁴ but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts."
- A. Paul often defended the Gospel
1. The Gospel was not his invention. He had received it from Christ and had been entrusted with it.
Galatians 1:11-12 NAU - "For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. ¹² For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but *I received it* through a revelation of Jesus Christ."
 2. This is why he defended it so fiercely
Galatians 1:8 NAU - "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!"
 3. Paul never altered his message. He never compromised the truth, even at great personal risk.

⁶ Spurgeon, *Lectures*, Page 408-409.

- B. Paul appeals to his calling from God
1 Thessalonians 2:4 NAU - "we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts."
1. Paul carefully guarded that of which he had been entrusted
 He carefully guarded the Gospel against error
1 Thessalonians 2:3 NAU - "For our exhortation does not *come* from error or impurity or by way of deceit;"
 2. This must be true of every preacher of the Gospel. He must carefully guard against error and pray that God will protect him from error or the enemy of pragmatism. Every sermon or Bible lesson must be examined by the question, "Is this the truth?"
 3. This will often be a place of accusation, particularly those focused upon sound doctrine. We must be resolute to never fear the condemnation of men, but always fear the frown of God.
- II. Paul calls attention to the integrity of his life
- A. He uses an emphatic reminder – "For you yourselves know, brethren" (reputation)
1. They knew how Paul and his companions had suffered
 2. They knew how he had been shamefully treated at Philippi
1 Thessalonians 2:2 NAU - "after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know"
 3. They also knew the kind of treatment he had experienced at Thessalonica
Acts 17:5 NAU - "But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar"
1 Thessalonians 1:6 NAU - "You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit"
 4. Paul's accusers were also accusing him of "impurity"
1 Thessalonians 2:3 NAU - "For our exhortation does not *come* from error or impurity or by way of deceit"
- B. Paul's enemies were calling into question his motives
1. They were accusing Paul of coming with the motive of taking advantage of them, of using them to his own advantage, comparing him to some of the false teachers of that day – Peter describes them:
2 Peter 2:13-15 NAU - "They are stains and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, as they carouse with you, ¹⁴ having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children; ¹⁵ forsaking the right way, they have gone astray"
 2. They were accusing Paul of having a motive of greed and deceit – that he was only trying to use and exploit them for his own selfish ends.
1 Thessalonians 2:5-6 NAU - "For 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. Paul reminds them in **Verse 2** of the suffering they experienced in Philippi. Why would they be willing to suffer so if they were merely seeking personal gain from the Gospel.
 4. Paul had but one motive – he wanted to live in a manner that pleased God. Some are motivated by gaining the approval of man. Paul was only interested in the approval of God. This was sufficient motivation for Paul. And it must be sufficient for us.
- C. One of our greatest guards against false accusations is our reputation –
1. He calls them and God as his witness. Paul always practiced what he preached.
 2. A good reputation takes years to develop, only moments to lose
 3. We should have an excellent reputation both inside and outside the church
 4. A good reputation is one of the qualifications for pastor:
1 Timothy 3:2 NAU - "An overseer, then, must be above reproach"
1 Timothy 3:7 NAU - "And he must have a good reputation with those outside *the church*"
 5. Paul's answer to his false accusers:
1 Thessalonians 2:1 NAU - "For you yourselves know, brethren"
1 Thessalonians 2:2 NAU - "as you know"
1 Thessalonians 2:5 NAU - "as you know"
1 Thessalonians 2:4 NAU - "but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts."
- D. But our ultimate judge is God
Paul called upon God as his witness and defender
1 Thessalonians 2:4 NAU - "but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts."
1. Paul defended his reputation but did not see it as the final judge
 2. God alone is the judge of man – before Him we will give account
1 Corinthians 4:3-4 NAU - "But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by *any* human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. ⁴ For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord."
 3. Paul knew God would judge his adversaries
Paul ultimately left all vengeance to God
2 Thessalonians 1:6-8 NAU - "For after all it is *only* just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, ⁷ and *to give* relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, ⁸ dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus."
 4. We must keep an eternal perspective, looking to the justice of the Judge of all the earth.

Conclusion:

1. Paul was content to serve Christ and trust His kind providence in his life. God is your witness, and His evaluation is the ultimate one that matters. If you are living faithfully for Christ, you WILL face opposition. There will be accusations. But God is faithful to preserve you.
Psalm 18:2-3 NAU - "The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. ³ I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, And I am saved from my enemies."
2. Christians have always faced those who would seek to malign their character. We must be careful to maintain our integrity.
 Peter wrote: **1 Peter 2:12** - "Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe *them*, glorify God in the day of visitation."
3. One final word. As hurtful as a false accusation may be, if truth be known there are a thousand other sins that might be uncovered and condemn us.
 There is a story about Martin Luther who had frequent encounters with the devil as the devil accused him of all manner of sin.
 "Martin, you are a liar, greedy, lecherous, a blasphemer, a hypocrite. You cannot stand before God." To which Luther would respond: "Well, yes, I am. And, indeed, Satan, you do not know the half of it. I have done much worse than that and if you care to give me your full list, I can no doubt add to it and help make it more complete. But you know what? My Saviour has died for all my sins—those you mention, those I could add and, indeed, those I have committed but am so wicked that I am unaware of having done so. It does not change the fact that Christ has died for all of them; his blood is sufficient; and on the Day of Judgment I shall be exonerated because he has taken all my sins on himself and clothed me in his own perfect righteousness."
4. Such thinking should be more than sufficient to trust our lives into the hands of our Savior.