

Under Fire - #2 Now and Eternity (sermon series on 1 & 2 Thessalonians)

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Text: 1 Thessalonians 2; focus on 1 Thessalonians 2:1-9.

NOTES

A. Introduction:

1. Life has many pressures that lead to criticism. we may feel blind-sided when criticized for our faith especially when it's within the church and by fellow Christians.
2. We can learn from Paul's gracious response to criticism.

B. Under Fire:

1. Historical background to Paul's Thessalonian letters is in Acts 17:1-10.
2. He was attacked for abandoning ship—deserting them (a serious offense: e.g. prison time for modern captain).
3. His critics said his visit to Thessalonica was a failure – 1 Thessalonians 2:1.
4. They accused him of having impure motives of greed, trickery and seeking man's applause – 1 Thes. 2:3,4.
5. Paul defends his actions. Said he was only doing what God told him to do, coming to them despite having already been flogged in Philippi – 1 Thes. 2: 1,3,4. **Pastor's paraphrase of Paul's defense:** *"We lived together; my life was transparent and on display in front of you."*
6. When people come against us for our faith, we can follow Paul's example:
 - a. Not run or hide ("turtle").
 - b. But continue to engage (with care, kindness, in a shepherding way – 1 Thes. 2:7,8) despite hostilities.
 - c. Pastor told a story of a woman who came to him full of hostility and hurt about the church. Over a time of listening to her, encouraging her, and praying for her, there was a turnaround. Recently she met him with: "Pastor, you saved my life."
 - d. We need to learn to release the hurts, anger, resentment and bitterness. **Dr. David Seamands:** *"You may be depressed because you hold on to anger and refuse to forgive people. Granted, those in authority may have misused their authority. But you need to forgive them. Release the hurt. Surrender the injustice. Open your heart to the Spirit"* in *Healing of Damaged Emotions*.

C. Grace Under Fire:

What we're really like comes out when we're under fire / pressure. (E.g. when we're teaching our children to drive: Pastor Derrick told on himself).

1. Paul's response:
 - a. "As you know..." – 1 Thes. 2:1. Paul reminded them that he had lived transparently before them, they knew him, he was authentic and did not need to pull back.
 - b. His ultimate approval came from God. **Os Guinness:** *"A life lived listening to the decisive call of God is a life lived before one audience that trumps all others—the Audience of One"* in *The Call*.
 - c. He was gentle. Gentleness lavishes tender care and affection even in a hostile setting.
 - d. He worked hard—was bi-vocational not wanting to be a burden.
2. What is our response? Can we follow Paul's example to forgive, be gracious, crucify revenge, refuse to quit?

D. What was the Source of Paul's Power to Be and Do What Was Right?

1. Character is proven in the critical moments of life.
2. **Dr. Gordon Fee:** *"The early church understood suffering as part of its lot Because they had experienced this new life, they also knew what it was to face life with great joy, not based on circumstances but on the indwelling power of the Spirit."*
3. It's possible to respond like Paul did because our power comes from the same source as his did—Jesus and the Holy Spirit – Matthew 11: 28, 30. The Spirit was also the source of Paul's joy – 1 Thessalonians 1:6. **Pastor Derrick:** *"Hide in Jesus; He is your source."*

MINISTRY:

1. What incidents in your life help you relate to Paul's experience of being misunderstood and criticized?
2. What may we be tempted to do when criticisms and accusations come against us, especially in the context of our faith and in the church? How did Paul handle these? How can Paul's reactions instruct and encourage us?
3. Are you naturally calm or volatile under pressure? If volatile, how do you deal with past failures? How can we, no matter what our natural tendency, handle pressure and criticism with grace? Pastor told us to "Hide in Jesus; He is your source." How do we "hide in Jesus"? In what way is He our source?

PRAYER:

Dear Father, thank You for this honest letter that deals with things we still face today. Help us to live for Your approval first, learn to release bitterness and the desire for revenge, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, live with grace in all circumstances. Amen.