

Fight The Good Fight

1 Timothy 1:18-20

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¹⁸ This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, ¹⁹ holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, ²⁰ among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

Have you ever had to take a stand for a deeply held conviction?

This past Friday I was reading about a man called Hugh Latimer. Hugh was a chaplain under King Henry VIII in the year 1535. It is said that there was time King Henry heard a sermon by Hugh and the king was offended. So the king warned him that he had power to take away his life if offended. And asked to him preach with the sense that he would not be in trouble with the king and God. So when Hugh had another opportunity to preach, Hugh repeated the same sermon he had preached the first time. That took some courage. Hugh was being faithful to the Word of God.

One of the sure markers of a true believer is that when you start following Jesus, conflict begins –spiritual conflict. But this is a conflict where God is on your side. There was a time when you and I were enemies of God. We are once rebels of God, offending, violating his laws but when God took the initiative. He reconciled us to himself. That reconciliation happened when you heard the Gospel and the Holy Spirit convicted you of your sin. And when you repented and trusted in the death of Jesus Christ as the remedy for your sin and its penalty, when you trusted in his resurrection as your hope, you were forgiven and declared righteous. In Christ you are now complete. So, now as a believer you have peace with God. You are no longer an enemy of God but his precious child. However, we are not in heaven or don't have a resurrected body yet. We live in a broken world of sin. So, from the time of your salvation until the time the Lord Jesus takes you to heaven, you are essentially in a conflict. Conflict with the ways of the world, with ideologies that are hostile to the ways of God, conflict with the devil's agenda, conflict with your own flesh.

Now, we are in this series called "Conducting ourselves in the household of God".

Paul has been instructing his disciple Timothy through this letter. So far we looked at the following key observations:

1. Paul writes this letter to urge and plead with Timothy to *command* certain people not to teach false doctrine or a different Gospel. They were promoting myths, endless genealogies, speculations and vain discussions. That's on the negative side. On the positive side, Paul also

writes this letter to inform about how one ought to conduct themselves in the church. The content of this letter along with Paul's letter to Titus are known as the Pastoral letters. They give us specific instructions as to how we ought to conduct ourselves as a church.

2. Paul says his motive is love that comes from a *cleansed heart*, a *good conscience* and a *sincere faith*.
3. Paul also writes to Timothy that these false teachers did not understand God's law properly. The law of God is laid for lawbreakers and unrighteous. Only Christ can make one right. And once you are made right with God, the law becomes your guardrail.
4. And last week we saw, Paul's own testimony. Paul calls himself the foremost of sinners. Paul said he used to be a blasphemer, a persecutor and as an insolent opponent. No matter how much he knew the law of God, Paul was a prisoner of his own sin. He was an unbeliever fighting against the disciples of Jesus and thereby fighting against God himself. And that is a fight no can win. Jesus himself told Paul that it was "*hard for him to kick against the goads*". A goad was a sharp stick that was used to prod the oxen to get them to move. But if the ox kicked against the goad, the ox could get hurt and start bleeding. So it would be pointless to fight against God. But Paul found grace and mercy from Jesus Christ. And Paul says the reason he received mercy is not because he had any merit in himself, but because of Jesus' perfect patience, Jesus' longsuffering nature, his character to endure those who have wronged him. And, of course, that conversion does not happen without repentance. In light of Paul's own radical conversion, he ends the previous passage with a note of giving honor and glory to God. And that ought to be our goal as well – to conduct ourselves by giving thanks, and honor and glory to God.

In today's passage, Paul tells Timothy that the Christian life is like that of a soldier who is always on duty. On guard and ready to fight. That is why Paul tells Timothy to "fight the good fight". Serve as a soldier in the kingdom of Christ. Timothy would have immediately recognized what his mentor was saying. In verse 18, Paul begins his instruction with a familiar word he had used before. Paul says "this charge" I entrust to you. Paul is like a military general commanding his soldier. Paul is firm and yet tender. Paul also calls Timothy as "my child".

****** When Paul wrote to the church Philippi, this is how he affirms Timothy "*But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel*". Philippians 2:22

****** To the church in Corinth, this is what Paul wrote about Timothy "*That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church*". 1 Corinthians 4:17

Timothy was appointed to ministry at some in the past. He was publicly ordained by the laying of hands. That's why in verse 18 we see Paul saying "accordance with the prophecies made about you".

Now why does Paul tell Timothy to fight the good fight of faith?

Paul has many reasons we see two main reasons:

1. At the time of this letter, Paul is a very seasoned and mature leader of the church. Paul had fought his battles of faith in his own life. In his second letter to Timothy, in 2 Timothy 4:7, Paul says, *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith”*. We’ll get to 2 Timothy one day Lord willing but Paul says that your Christian life is like that of a long race. And Paul knows that the task Timothy has is a challenging one.
2. So the main reason Paul tells Timothy to keep fighting is keep the Gospel pure. Not to deviate from the Bible’s instruction. To promote sound doctrine. Healthy teaching. Preach the whole counsel of God. 2 Timothy 4: 1-4 *“I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: ² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. ³ For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths”*.

And how is Timothy to fight the good fight?

Look at verse 19.

¹⁸ *This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, ¹⁹ holding faith and a good conscience.*

Two ways:

Faith and good conscience.

There are people who say, “follow your own heart”, “obey your conscience”, do whatever your heart says. But how do you know your heart is right, how do you know your conscience is good or right? The Bible says that is heart is deceitful above all things. Our hearts can be easily deceived if they are not tempered by the truth. It must be informed by the truth.

That is why faith is required. Meaning the conscience or the heart must be informed by the objective principles of the faith.

Someone said, *‘What are the values of a Good Soldier?’ ... ‘Freedom and courage. Freedom is what makes us fight, and courage is what keeps us from running away.’*

What is the danger in not following Paul’s instruction?

What would be the fallout of not having faith and a good conscience?

Look at verse 20.

By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith,²⁰ among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

By rejecting faith and a good conscience, by rejecting sound doctrine, by rejecting Gospel centrality, by rejecting the whole counsel of God and by embracing false doctrine, and myths and vain discussions, some people have shipwrecked their faith.

This is the fallout: A shipwrecked faith.

What does this mean? It means some of these people have lost their balance. It means their ship of faith has wrecked. It has not been sunk but broken. A lot of damage is done by shipwrecks.

And Paul names two specific individuals among these people who have strayed. Hymenaeus and Alexander.

What do we know about these two men? Paul writes in 2 Timothy chapter two.

“¹⁶ But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness,¹⁷ and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus,¹⁸ who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some” 2 Timothy 2:16-18

Hymenaeus is leading people into ungodliness and upsetting the faith of some by saying Jesus has already come back.

What about Alexander?

There is one Alexander Paul talks about in his second letter to Timothy. That Alexander did harm to Paul and even opposed Paul. (2 Timothy 4:14). We are not sure if these two men are the same person but Paul identifies this man as someone to avoid.

So, some people deviating from sound doctrine have shipwrecked their faith. And what does Paul do with them? Does he write them off?

Look at the last part of verse 20

By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith,²⁰ among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

Paul wants to excommunicate them. He wants to apply a corrective measure. He wants to apply discipline. And what is Paul's goal? Paul's desire is that God's name is not blasphemed. He himself was a blasphemer once. His hope is that their faith would be salvaged from the shipwreck. Look in 1 Corinthians 5.

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. ² And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

³ For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. ⁴ When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵ you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

Paul wants the church to be pure. And for the church to be pure there must be discipline. And discipline, even though, it is painful it yields the fruit righteousness in the end.

I want to close with some tools to equip you in fighting the good fight.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians that “³ *though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh.* ⁴ *For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds*”
2 Corinthians 10:3-4

Ephesians 5:13-17

“¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”.

I began my message with Hugh Latimer's story. Two years after he had preached his sermon, after the king had died, Mary had become the queen. She did not like protestants. And a result Hugh was burned at the stake. People like Hugh are those who fought the good fight.

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: **Fight the Good Fight.** 1 Timothy 1:18-20

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. Why does Paul instruct Timothy to "fight the good fight"? Verses 19-20, 2 Timothy 2:4, 4:3

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. How does Paul instruct Timothy to fight the good fight? Verse 19. Go around and share other Scriptures as well.
3. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

4. For personal reflection: How can you keep yourself from shipwrecking your faith?