

Fight for the Good Fight of Faith

1 Timothy 1:18-20

Introduction: Reading *American Shaolin* – marital arts requires devotion, discipline, and pain. When we view the Christian life as warfare, we need all three.

Every believer must fight for the truth.

I. Remember your calling and mission and remain devoted to the Lord who called you (1:18).

A. The expression “this charge” refers not to “fighting the good fight” but to the charge given back in vv. 3-5 of this chapter.

1. The exhortation to “fight the good fight” is a summary of what carrying out that charge will involve.
2. The “charge” (“command” or “instruction”) involves both the negative aspect of correction (v. 3) and the positive one of exhortation and edification via instruction (4b-5).
3. This charge is the basis and foundation of the exhortations given in the rest of the book (2:1).
4. The reference to Timothy as a “son” reveals not only affection for Timothy, but also a measure of authority.

B. The word “commit” means to “entrust something to someone.”

1. This word has two ideas inherent in it: (1) safeguarding and (2) handing it down.
2. This charge is the same one with which Paul himself has been entrusted.

C. The “prophecies” were God’s own statements about Timothy’s calling and mission.

1. This word is usually used to refer to supernatural revelations from God.
2. The best passage to help one understand the use of this word is Acts 13:1-4 in which Luke states the “Holy Spirit said” that Barnabas and Saul were set apart for a work. The immediate context begins with a reference to prophets.
3. The prophecy probably had to do not only with Timothy’s call to ministry in general but also, given Paul’s reference to them here, to a specific duty Timothy was to perform and carry out.

D. The *ὅτι* clause at the end describes what this charge will entail. As stated above, it is a summary of what this charge will involve.

1. Paul calls it the “good fight” because it is waged in accord with the gospel. It involves fighting against Satan and the forces that oppose God and his kingdom, including those who abandon that faith and a good conscience and who teach falsehood.
2. Paul uses this imagery again in 2 Tim. 2:3-4 and reveals there that two further things are involved in waging this spiritual warfare: a willingness to endure hardship and the desire to please the commander through complete obedience.

2 Timothy 2:3-4 *You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. ⁴ No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.*

3. The aforementioned prophecies will serve to strengthen Timothy in the fight.

2 Timothy 1:6-7 *Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. ⁷ For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*

Application: Remembering these prophecies was to steel and encourage Timothy in the carrying out of this calling and mission. We allow ourselves to get distracted in our mission or we forget how our service fits into the bigger picture. We don’t have to understand everything that God is doing in order to remain faithful to our calling; we simply have to get back to the “main thing.” What joy did you have when you first became a believer or first became involved in church, what has drawn you away from that feeling? You cannot function on feeling for long; there must be something more, something at the very core of your existence. Choose your principles in light of God’s work in your soul and perform your every action and decision in light of those eternal truths.

II. Maintain your walk of faith through discipline (1:19).

A. The “faith” mentioned here is not the body of Christian belief, as is often the case, but the act of believing or trusting in God and his revelation.

1. This is the way Paul has used this word throughout this chapter: vv. 2, 4, 5, 14, cf. 16.
2. Faith is one’s believing God and trusting in God on the basis of his revelation (cf. Rom. 10:14; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; 2 Tim 2:18).
3. This faith as an activity of the soul is connected to one’s “having” a good conscience.

B. Paul mentions one’s “good conscience” because it is essential not only to avoiding shipwreck of one’s faith, but is essential to fighting the good fight of faith.

1. A good conscience is “a state in which one’s moral self-evaluation accurately registers that one has been obedient to God” (Knight, 109).
2. When one rejects, literally “pushes aside” (KJV said “put away”) a good conscience, one is willfully and “self- consciously disobedient to God’s requirements” and commandments because having a good conscience implies “self-conscious obedience” (Knight, 109).
3. It is hard to determine exactly what Paul is referring to here, but if we take the actions of Hymenaeus (2 Tim. 2:16-19) and Alexander (2 Tim. 4:14-15) as a guide, then it would involve not only general sin and wickedness, youthful lusts and a need for repentance, but also false teaching and the opposing of biblical and apostolic teaching.
4. All of this leads to shipwreck with regard to the faith, that is, the destruction not only of one’s own faith, but also of the faith of those whom they have led astray.

Application: Paul writes **2 Corinthians 10:4-6** “For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, ⁵ casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, ⁶ and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.” Your conscience is to be guided by the Spirit through the Word and requires constant attention. You must pay as careful attention to it as you do to your diet, your medication, your other tasks. Faith is instrumental here; you must believe that God is right and that what he says is for you, to build you up.

III. Guard against those who would lead you astray (1:20).

A. Hymenaeus and Alexander are both mentioned in 2 Timothy and were apparently leaders in the church at Ephesus whom Paul had come to regard as false teachers.

1. Hymenaeus taught that the resurrection had already taken place (2 Tim. 2:18).
2. Alexander vigorously opposed Paul’s teaching so that Paul warned Timothy to be on guard against him (2 Tim. 4:14-15).
3. These leaders were not interested in the health and safety of the church nor were they concerned about perpetuation true biblical doctrine, but about promoting their own views at the expense of the gospel.

B. Blasphemy is a sin widely regarded as unforgivable because of confusion surrounding what exactly it is.

1. There is a difference between “blasphemy” and “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.
2. “Blasphemy” is to show disrespect, dishonor, or disregard toward God, the truth of God (6:1; Titus 2:5; acts 13:8, 10), or the sacred things of God. This sin is forgivable (cf. 1:13; here, Matt. 12:31; Luke 12:10).
3. On the other hand, “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit,” which is the attributing of the work of Christ by the Spirit to the power of Satan, is unforgivable (Matt. 12:31; Luke 12:10).

4. These men blasphemed because they willfully rejected the apostolic teaching and even opposed it openly. This led to their rejection of a “good conscience” before God and, perhaps, other sins also (cf. the context following Hymenaeus in 2 Tim. 2:19-26).
- C. The purpose of one’s “being handed over to Satan” is to spur them to return to the faith and to seek repentance and renewed faith so that they may be spared from eternal destruction (cf. 1 Cor. 5:1-13).
1. The only other reference to this statement is in Paul’s instruction regarding church discipline in 1 Cor. 5, though there are similar expressions used elsewhere (e.g., Rom. 1:28; Eph. 4:19).
 - a. This “delivering over to Satan” is an act of discipline carried out by the church under the direction of biblical leadership for unrepentant sin (not just sexual or moral), which involved putting the offender out of the fellowship of the church.
 - b. This “giving them over” is handing them to the realm they have themselves already chosen (cf. Eph. 4:19).
 2. The ἵνα clause gives the purpose for which H & A were handed over: so that they might be taught not to blaspheme (cf. 1 Cor. 5:5).
 - a. God can use Satan for his own ends (a wonderful display of God’s sovereignty) as in Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” which he identified as a “messenger of Satan” and which he said taught him godly humility (2 Cor. 12:7).
 - b. This happens when the person handed over comes to realize that their false belief and sinful activity (the two cannot be separated) is displeasing to God and has separated him from God.
 - c. The separation from God’s people is important because it is a physical picture of the spiritual reality (which is probably why else where Paul describes it as refusing to eat with the one so disciplined).

Application: This is not an attack on the person being disciplined, but an attack on the forces that have seduced and led astray the one disciplined. It is easy to be mistaken in our loyalty; our loyalty must be to the truth because that is the only way to rescue that one from the forces of darkness and unbelief. True discipline of this sort is painful (or should be) but is necessary to maintaining the health of the church.

Conclusion: Warfare is not fun, but the Christian life, while it is not all warfare, much of our time and energy is spent guarding our hearts against anything that would seduce us from our devotion to Christ. Be willing to fight the good fight and be ruthless against those things that would draw you away from him.