

# 1 Timothy – The Household of God

*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 (1 Timothy 1:18 ESV)*

*I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, <sup>15</sup> if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. (1 Timothy 3:14-15 ESV)*

## **Wage The Good Warfare**

**November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

**1 Timothy 1:18-20**

**Rev. Levi denBok**

### **Introduction:**

Good morning! Please turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Timothy chapter 1.

In my undergraduate degree I minored in music. I had a professor – a professor that I deeply love and appreciate now – who was an absolute nightmare for me. He refused to let me coast. He was relentless as he pushed, and corrected, and challenged. He brought me to tears more than once. And yet, even though he told me things that I didn't want to hear, he did it because he cared. He celebrated my victories and was happier than I was on the days when I lived up to my potential. I can honestly say, he is the best professor I've ever had. He taught me the most important extrabiblical lesson that I learned in my time at Heritage, and it can be summed up in one phrase that he recited all the time: Practice does **not** make perfect. Practice makes *permanent*.

He was right. You can practice for eight hours a day, but if you are practicing with lazy, undisciplined habits, then you'll play with lazy, undisciplined habits. That is true in music. That is true in sports. That is true in work. That is true in life. Like a ship that charted off course by two meters and wound up 100 miles from its destination, so too will we find ourselves lost – and even shipwrecked – if we turn a blind eye to bad habits and patterns in our thinking and living today.

Hear this: Correction is mercy. Rebuke is love. A famous puritan once wrote:

Although my patients might become angry when I probe their infected wounds, they will thank me when they recover. If I am afraid to tell people about their sins, I murder their souls.<sup>1</sup>

When we are too afraid to say the things that need to be said – when we compromise on our convictions and make peace with sin – we murder souls. Do you believe that? Evidently, as we will see in our text this morning, the Apostle Paul did. Look with me now to 1 Timothy chapter 1. We’re going to be reading from verses 18-20. Hear now God’s holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today.

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,<sup>19</sup> holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith,<sup>20</sup> among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme. (1 Timothy 1:18-20 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

The “charge” that Paul refers to in verse 18 refers back to the opening command of the letter. Paul is coming back full circle to the charge that he gave to Timothy in verse 3. There he wrote:

As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, **remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine,**<sup>4</sup> nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. (1 Timothy 1:3-4 ESV)

Paul is writing to young Pastor Timothy, and he is reminding him that pastoral ministry is not for the faint of heart. He is sending him into a church that is in disarray and he is sending him with an intimidating assignment: “Stay in that city and say the hard things that need to be said! You will be tempted to soften the sharp hedges. You will be tempted to bite your tongue to avoid offense. But you can’t! Because there’s too much at stake! Wage the good warfare, Timothy!”

Let me say that again because I don’t want you to miss it: Ministry is SPIRITUAL WARFARE. The devil was gaining a foothold in Ephesus. The church that had started strong was on the verge

---

<sup>1</sup> George Swinnock as cited by Yuille, J. Stephen. A Labor of Love: Puritan Pastoral Priorities (p. 27). Reformation Heritage Books. Kindle Edition.

of shipwreck because there was seemingly no one in Ephesus with enough courage to say what needed to be said!

Paul wouldn't have it! So, he charged Timothy to have the hard talks that no one else was willing to have. If you've ever tried to confront someone on their sin, you know that this is easier said than done. In our text this morning, Paul is preparing Timothy to wage the good warfare.

## Preparing To Wage The Good Warfare

First, he tells Timothy:

### 1. Remember Who sent you

We see that in verse 18 where Paul writes:

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 (1 Timothy 1:18 ESV)

The Apostle Paul is alluding here to a scene that is not described in the book of Acts. We can't recreate the events exactly, but at some point, someone prophesied that Timothy was to be set apart for this task. It could be that Paul received a word from the Lord instructing him to send Timothy to correct and restore the church in Ephesus. It could be that Paul is pointing back to a time when Timothy was commissioned to join Paul on his missionary journey.

At the risk of reading our modern practices into this text but, because I think it might be helpful in understanding this verse, I want to share with you a story about my commissioning. There was a time when we didn't know who would be the future pastor of Redeemer. It was becoming obvious that Pastor Paul wouldn't be able to preach at both sites forever and the search was on to find someone who could be trained to take the baton. At the end of a long, prayerful process, we had our January board retreat and the elders excused the staff for one last prayer. Then, one of the elders came out and invited me to join them in the meeting room. They sat me down, they told me that they felt that God was calling me to this assignment and then those ten men circled around me, placed their hands on me and prayed that God would equip me for the task.

Now, to be clear, Timothy's experience would have undoubtedly been different. Nevertheless, in this verse, Paul is reminding Timothy of an experience that would have been *something like that*. He was pointing him back to a powerful memory to inspire courage in Timothy for task ahead.

Paul is saying, "Timothy, what have you to fear? You didn't choose this assignment for yourself. It's not a mistake that this responsibility has landed on your shoulders! GOD gave you this assignment, Timothy! Do you remember? GOD set you apart for this task! He will equip you! He will enable you! He will see it through! So, get on with your assignment." As one commentator notes:

Timothy is solemnly reminded that the ministry is not a matter to be trifled with, but an order from the commander-in-chief.<sup>2</sup>

By pointing back to the prophecies, Paul was reminding Timothy that the assignment came from a source infinitely higher than Paul. Now, remember Who sent you, Timothy, and wage the good warfare. Second, Paul tells Timothy:

## 2. **Guard your belief and your behavior**

Look with me at verse 19:

wage the good warfare, <sup>19</sup>holding **faith** and **a good conscience**. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith (1 Timothy 1:18b-19 ESV)

As Timothy prepared to speak into the bad practice and the bad theology of the false teachers in Ephesus, he needed to make sure that his own belief and his own behavior were in alignment with the gospel. It's hard to confront someone for their hypocrisy when you are living like a hypocrite.

Now, to be clear, Timothy *wasn't* living like a hypocrite, but Paul wanted to ensure that Timothy understood the stakes. If Timothy failed to guard his own heart, the restoration mission in Ephesus would fall apart and the church would be devastated. Those were the stakes. When pastors fall into sin and error, there are devastating consequences for the church.

---

<sup>2</sup> Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 14 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 80.

The primary pastoral battle is the personal battle for holiness. To be a pastor is to bring yourself into submission – and then to call on others to join you. This is true for pastoring, and it is also true in parenting, isn't it? The day will surely come when your child will want to go down a sinful path – a path that you know will end in pain and ruin. Are you positioning yourself to have influence in their life when that day comes? Let me say it bluntly: If you're living like a hypocrite today, you're forfeiting your influence for tomorrow. If your style of leadership in the home is: "Do as I say, not as I do", then you have set your children up for disaster. However, if they have observed for a lifetime that your walk matches your talk – if they have had the privilege of seeing your slow and steady war with sin – then, by God's grace, you will be well positioned to lead them through life's storms.

That's what Timothy is being called to here. He's being called to set a good example in word and deed in the household of God as he corrects the teachers who have wandered into sin. So, how do you guard your belief and behavior?

Hold fast to faith. As I mentioned earlier, this verse is an extension of the argument Paul made in verses 3-7, so we can safely assume that Paul is using the word "faith" here to summarize all of "the doctrine" that he alluded to earlier. John Calvin notes:

I understand the word *faith* to be a general term, denoting sound doctrine.<sup>3</sup>

The false teachers in Ephesus had grown bored of the old, old gospel story and so they spent their time fixating on novelty and mythology and other brands of stupid. Timothy needed to resist the urge to give any of his time or attention to that foolishness and is instead to hold fast to the faith once for all delivered to the saints. "Hold onto Jesus, Timothy, and he will hold onto you! Preach Christ and him crucified! That's what the people need, and that's what YOU need! Hold fast!"

And, directly related, as Timothy held onto the faith he needed to hold fast to a good conscience. Your conscience is like that lane assist alarm that goes off when you start veering off the path. When you start doing things that you shouldn't be doing, your conscience sounds the alarm. If you ignore that alarm, you will crash. You can't have a good conscience if you're indulging in habitual

---

<sup>3</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries (Complete)*, trans. John King, Accordance electronic ed. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), paragraph 92134.

sin. You can't have a good conscience if you are making peace with things that you know are wrong. To hold fast to a good conscience then is to live a life of obedience to God's word. It is to practice what you preach.

If Timothy is going to wage the good warfare, then he is going to need to guard his belief and his behavior. Finally, in preparation for this difficult assignment, Paul warns Timothy:

### 3. Don't assume that you are immune

Look with me at verse 20:

By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith,<sup>20</sup> among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme. (1 Timothy 1:19b-20 ESV)

Before we go any further, I suspect I should take a moment to explain what Paul means here when he describes these two men as having been "handed over to Satan." This phrase is referring to the process of church discipline. Paul uses the same language in 1 Corinthians 5. Do you remember that story? There was an active member of the church who was having a sexual affair with his father's wife. The church knew about it. The church tolerated it. In fact, the church thought that it was an impressive testimony to their patience that they would continue to turn a blind eye to the obvious sin! Paul did not share the sentiment. He wrote:

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.<sup>2</sup> And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

<sup>3</sup>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.<sup>4</sup> When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus,<sup>5</sup> **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. (1 Corinthians 5:1-5 ESV)

Do you see that? Paul uses the same language in our passage for this morning. To excommunicate a person – to publicly identify that they are no longer a member of the church because they are no longer living in obedience to Jesus – is to hand them over to Satan. It is to say in effect, "This

person has rejected Christ and, therefore, he is not a Christian. We are not going to pretend otherwise.” This is necessary because, as one commentator notes:

the greatest injury done by wicked men is when they mingle with others under the presence of holding the same faith.<sup>4</sup>

That was the danger in Ephesus and, to be frank, it is the danger in almost every church in North America. By and large we don't practice church discipline anymore and, as a result, time and time again we watch as young, immature believers are led astray by sinful, deceitful wolves who were allowed to linger in the church because we're all too polite to say what needs to be said. But our "politeness" is unloving. It's unloving to the countless men and women and boys and girls who have been hurt by people who should have been confronted. It's also unloving to the world because we are allowing evil men and women to masquerade as representatives of Jesus and that makes sharing the gospel really hard!

But – and here's the piece that we often fail to consider – it's also unloving to the hypocrites who need someone to call them out on their sin. They need someone to love them enough to tell them that they are deceived and that they're on the road to ruin. Listen to what Paul says at the end of both of these commands. He tells the church to hand them over to Satan – to kick them out of the church:

**that they may learn** not to blaspheme. (1 Timothy 1:120b ESV)

**so that his spirit may be saved** in the day of the Lord. (1 Corinthians 5:5b ESV)

Do you see that? As one commentator notes:

However stringent the process **the motive was mercy**, and whenever ecclesiastical discipline has departed from this purpose of restoration, its harshness has proved a barrier to progress.<sup>5</sup>

Christian correction must always be delivered from a place of sincere love with a motive of mercy.

---

<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries (Complete)*, trans. John King, Accordance electronic ed. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), paragraph 92142.

<sup>5</sup> Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 14 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 82.

But all of that was a lengthy aside to prepare us to hear the real point of this verse. Paul had already excommunicated Hymenaeus and Alexander, so this verse isn't calling Timothy to do that again. Instead, this verse is calling Timothy to consider their excommunication and to be humbled. As Timothy engaged with the process of correction, Paul wanted him to have his eyes wide open to the fact that he could just as easily find his own faith shipwrecked. Paul says the same thing in his letter to the Galatians:

Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. **Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.** (Galatians 6:1 ESV)

Over the last few years, we have witnessed the fall of some high-profile Christian leaders. In the midst of those scandals, I noticed a curious and concerning trend. Some Christians lamented the scandals and said, "But for the grace of God, there go I!" They used the situation to remind themselves of the fact that sin is dangerous and that we need to guard our hearts lest we also shipwreck our faith.

But – and this was a response I did not expect – some of my peers were really upset with that response. They said things like, "How dare you compare yourself to him! By suggesting that you too could fall into that lifestyle, you minimize the things that he did! Good people don't just 'slip into' this kind of behavior!" I read those responses and my jaw hit the floor. REALLY?! HAVE YOU READ YOUR BIBLE?!

Paul tells Timothy, "As you head into this assignment, look at those men. Look at Hymenaeus. Look at Alexander. They didn't set out to be heretics. They didn't roll out of bed one morning and choose to follow Satan. Day by day, slowly and steadily, they compromised. Before you go any further, Timothy, take a close look at the outcome of their lives. Hold on tight to your faith and to a good conscience or you will find yourself shipwrecked right next to them. Don't assume that you are immune." That's true for pastors. That's true for parents. That's true for mentors. That's true for all of us. Take heed, lest you fall.

Having considered the text, with the little time that we have remaining this morning I want to unpack two implications for us today.



## Implications

First, in light of what we have read, let's remember that:

### 1. **Hard talks are better than hard falls**

I will go ahead and put my cards on the table: I HATE hard talks. It always feels like warfare, but it rarely feels good. Everything inside of me wants to avoid them. If God told me right now that I will never need to have a hard talk again, I would learn how to do a cartwheel and then I would cartwheel all the way around this gymnasium! They are not fun. They are the reason my hair is turning grey. They are the reason why I developed a weird, stress-related eye twitch in 2020.

Hard talks stink. But they pale in comparison to weeping at a funeral while you kick yourself for not ever having the courage to lovingly confront your friend about the sin he had made peace with.

Hard talks stink, but they pale in comparison to sitting in an Annual General Meeting and watching as an entire denomination – 340 churches – opt to turn a blind eye to sin as they run headlong into ruin.

Hard talks stink, but they pale in comparison to the disillusioned kids who watch as their mom and dad – faithful members of a happy church – finalize their divorce after years of growing apart without anyone caring enough to speak up.

Hard talks stink, but hard falls are worse, and evangelism in our culture has become significantly more challenging because 90% of the people in our community have witnessed or have been hurt by hard falls – hard falls that could have been avoided – hard falls that happened because no one was courageous enough to have the hard talks.

So, let's have the hard talks in here before we do any more damage out there. Amen? Do you see a marriage in crisis? Talk to them! Pray for them! Do you see a kid letting go of the faith and wandering into the world? Do you see a pastor untethering from the text? Do you see a pattern of gossip, or anger, or bitterness, or self-righteousness? Do you see a hard fall on the horizon? Then

SAY SOMETHING! In love. With an aim towards restoration. Wage the good warfare! Have the hard talks.

Second, and finally:

## 2. Ignoring your conscience will shipwreck your faith

Look closely at verse 19:

holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting **this**, some have made shipwreck of their faith (1 Timothy 1:19 ESV)

Paul doesn't use the plural "these" but opts instead for the singular "this" because the false teachers in Ephesus had shipwrecked their faith by rejecting a good conscience. John Calvin wrote:

A bad conscience is, therefore, the mother of all heresies.<sup>6</sup>

We often talk about how bad theology leads to bad behavior, and that's certainly true. But our text this morning reminds us that the *opposite* is also true – bad behavior leads to bad theology. If you make peace with sin today – if you ignore your conscience today – you will find a way to justify it tomorrow. One commentator notes:

More often than we know, religious error has its roots in moral rather than in intellectual causes.<sup>7</sup>

What does this mean? It means that, if you make peace with sin – if you decide to indulge in, turn a blind eye to, or endorse something that you know is wrong – then you will MOST CERTAINLY seek out a new hermeneutic – a new way of interpreting the Bible – to justify your behavior.

---

<sup>6</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries (Complete)*, trans. John King, Accordance electronic ed. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), paragraph 92137.

<sup>7</sup> E. F. Scott as quoted by William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles – World Biblical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 67.

I didn't want to use this example, but I think I would be pastorally negligent if I didn't. I suspect that the biggest theological challenge we will face in Canada over the next ten years will be a widespread reinterpretation of what the Bible says about homosexuality.

Now I want to say before I go any further that God calls us to love the LGBTQ+ community. Every person is made in the image of God and should be treated with love and respect, and the church has often failed in the way that we have engaged with this community. We can and we must do a much better job of resembling Jesus as we reach out. Yes!

But, if we would resemble Jesus, then our love and compassion must also come with the truth. The gospel is GOOD NEWS for everyone! But the gospel tells the truth about sin. All sin. Which means that we can't hide the truth that God's word clearly teaches that homosexuality is sin.

Why are we talking about this? We're talking about this because this issue is where the rubber will meet the road – this issue is where we will face the greatest temptation to ignore our conscience. When our loved ones – our kids, or our siblings, or our friends – look at us and say, “How can you say that this is sin?”, everything inside of us is going to want to let go of what the Bible says. Motivated by empathy and love, we are going to want to show maximum affirmation and celebration and endorsement, and we're going to want to compromise on God's truth.

Which means, we will need to adopt a new way of reading the Bible – an approach that explains away every passage that explicitly identifies homosexuality as sin. I'm not a prophet, but I expect that, in ten years, 70% of the evangelical churches in Canada will have adopted a hermeneutic – a way of reading the Bible – that allows us to do exactly the opposite of what it clearly says.

70% likely seems extreme, but I say that because the majority of churches in Canada have *already* adopted that hermeneutic – they just haven't applied it to this issue yet.

For example, in a few weeks, we're going to deal with passages in 1 Timothy that speak to gender roles in the church. I'm going to read the text, explain the text, and apply the text just like I do every other week, but it is going to feel offensive and awkward. Why is that? Because the majority of North American churches decided long ago to explain away those troublesome passages. To be clear, I'm not in any way suggesting that these issues are the same. My grandma was a preacher,

and she is in heaven now – not a doubt in my mind. People who have adopted this approach on the issue of gender are not in sin – but the method that they used to come to that conclusion from the text is the same method that is now being applied to this issue.

The outside world already sees this, by the way. For example, in 2015, a journalist from GQ spent months attending Hillsong church in New York. By the end of her time, she had grown to love the people but their stance on homosexuality was a stumbling block for her. Listen to what she says about the way that they handled the Bible:

... if you can back down from your doctrine of biblical inerrancy in order to let women pastor at Hillsong—because the Bible *does* clearly say that women shouldn't—then surely you could blur your eyes and see that Jesus never actually said anything about gays or abortion.<sup>8</sup>

This lady off the street identified in a few short months that we have already adopted an approach towards the Bible that has swung the door wide open for reinterpretation. If you can permit yourself to do the *opposite* of what the Bible says when it comes to men and women in the church by arguing that the culture has changed, and that Paul was using a unique Greek word, and that Jesus never addressed the issue explicitly, then why can't you do it for *these* issues? “You squinted your eyes before when it was convenient for you! Do it again!”

For that reason, I believe we're ten years away from a very different church in Canada – and my estimation might be too generous. The neighbors will applaud it as progress. Any church that dares to say, “but wait, that's not what the Bible says” will face the kind of backlash that our brothers and sisters are facing in Newfoundland right now. Protests. Hate groups. Kicked out of rental facilities. Harassment. Our friends a few provinces over are facing that TODAY and it will only be harder when the majority church has taken the leap.

It was hard to be a Christian in Ephesus. It was hard to be a Christian in Rome. It is hard to be a Christian in Newfoundland. It will be hard to be a Christian in Orillia. That's the truth.

But – and hear this loud and clear – God has given us ALL THAT WE NEED!

---

<sup>8</sup> Taffy Brodesser-Akner, *Inside Hillsong, the Church of Choice for Justin Bieber and Kevin Durant*, (GQ, December 17, 2015), <https://www.gq.com/story/inside-hillsong-church-of-justin-bieber-kevin-durant>. Accessed Nov. 2, 2021

So hold fast.

Hold fast to the faith, and don't settle for anything less than God's truth preached from God's word. Don't give an inch to novelty and myths and speculation.

Hold fast to a clean conscience. Don't compromise. Stop watching filth on Netflix and numbing your conscience. Stop indulging in things that you would be ashamed of if anyone else knew.

Look at those who have shipwrecked their faith! Are you immune? Can you play with sin and walk away unscathed?

And, as you hold to faith and a good conscience, have the hard talks with your brothers and sisters in Christ. There's going to be sin lurking in my life that I don't see. There's going to be problems that need to be addressed. You wouldn't let your friend climb over the trench and run into battle without putting on his helmet. In the same way, if you see that your brother has left himself vulnerable in this spiritual battle, you need to love him enough to tell him.

I believe that we have a tremendous opportunity in the years to come to declare to the watching world that God's way is right and that it leads to life. I believe God will bless us as we hold fast to Him and that He will use us in unexpected ways. I believe that, but I don't take it for granted. I see Hymenaeus and Alexander. I see Ravi Zacharias and Mark Driscoll. I see the United Church and the YMCA. There but for the grace of God go I.

Let's pray together.