

“Fighting the Good Fight”
1 Timothy 1:18-20
(Preached at Trinity, December 27, 2020)

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. **Chapter 1** serves as an introduction to this epistle. Paul states the problem of the false teachers and expresses his great awe and wonder at the grace God had demonstrated in his life. This led to Paul's concluding doxology:
1 Timothy 1:17 NAU - "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen."
2. Paul now turns attention to Timothy. Timothy was on a most difficult mission.
 - A. Paul reminds him of the charge given to him.
Verse 18 - "This command I entrust to you, Timothy, *my son*"
What command is Paul referring to? It is given in the context of **Verse 3**
1 Timothy 1:3 NAU - "As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines,"
 - B. These false teachers were strong and forceful.
Paul never failed to remember that our warfare transcends the actions of mere men. We are involved in a terrible war with unseen forces.
With this context Paul charges Timothy to fight the good fight.
1 Timothy 1:18 NAU - "This command I entrust to you, Timothy, *my son*, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight,"
 - C. By "the prophecies" Paul is probably making reference to Timothy's ordination to the Gospel ministry. It is repeated in **Chapter 4**
1 Timothy 4:14 NAU - "Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery."
The Gospel had been entrusted to his care, a charge that carried many dangers and would require great diligence.
Matthew Henry: "Ministers must war this good warfare, must execute their office diligently and courageously, notwithstanding oppositions and discouragements."¹
3. This warfare is not limited to pastors. Every Christian is in the midst of a great war. We find this over and over in the N.T. The Christian life is a fierce warfare against a great triune enemy - The world system, Satan, and our own flesh

¹ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2352.

4. Paul dealt with this subject over and over in his epistles
- A. In Romans 7 he described this horrible struggle with his own flesh that caused him to cry out, "O wretched man that I am..."
 - B. He also wrote of our conflict with this world system.
Romans 12:2 NAU - "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."
 - C. Paul also spoke of our great spiritual war with actual spiritual beings under the leadership of Satan
Ephesians 6:12 NAU - "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*."
Our satanic battle is the chief focus of this passage.
5. Satan seeks to undermine the redemptive work of Christ.
- A. Satan blinds the unbelieving
2 Corinthians 4:3-4 NAU - "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, ⁴ in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."
 - 1. He does this through ignorance and deception
 - 2. He is the master of false religion
 - B. Satan also turns his wrath against the Church of Christ. War has been declared. He seeks to cripple us in fear, discourage, and weaken - to destroy our witness.
6. We can see this war demonstrated early in the life of Peter
- A. Peter had all manner of outward confidence. Satan wanted to destroy him, to paralyze him in unbelief.
Luke 22:31-34 NAU - "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat; ³² but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." ³³ But he said to Him, "Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!" ³⁴ And He said, "I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me."
 - B. If Satan had succeeded the Christianity would have died
But Christ protects His own
Luke 22:32 NAU - "but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail;"
 - C. Peter never forgot this attack
1 Peter 5:8-9 NAU - "Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ But resist him, firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world."

8. Timothy was in the midst of this kind of battle. Paul had left Timothy in Ephesus to stand against the enemy of the Church of Ephesus, namely, false teachers who were undermining their faith. His true enemy, however, was Satan.
2 Corinthians 11:13-15 NAU - "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵ Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds."
9. Verse 18 - Paul reassures Timothy of his commission - that it was by Divine revelation. (received by prophecy)
 And then charges him, "fight the good fight"
 From - *καλος* - good, honorable
 and *στρατεια* - warfare, fight - expedition or military campaign
 We are in the best, most noble, most honorable fight in all the universe
10. Fighting the good fight implies that we can be involved in improper fighting.
 A. We must guard against pride. We must guard against needless debate, quibbling over non-essential issues. We must steer clear of distracting controversies. We must not be mean-spirited or harsh but gentle and kind.
2 Timothy 2:22-24 NAU - "Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love *and* peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. ²³ But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. ²⁴ The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged,"
 B. The good fight is a war for the souls of men to the honor of our God.
11. Now Paul gives the two primary and essential elements in this war.
 It rests upon faith and a good conscience
- I. Often faith refers to the experience of faith, of trusting Christ.
 But faith here refers to the Christian faith, the Gospel, the Apostolic faith.
 This is the truth upon which we must gird our loins
 "keeping faith" - embracing faith
- A. This truth is absolute truth, unchanging truth, life giving truth
1. Paul is talking about warfare for the sake of doctrinal integrity
 Timothy is being charged to wage a good war for the sake of sound theology.
 2. We must have a settled conviction that the Bible is absolute -
 It is unconditional. It is truth upon which we take our stand.
 3. We must always stress doctrinal purity fixed upon Biblical authority
- B. This must be stressed as foundational - it is being undermined today
1. The church has lost her authority today because she has lost her foundation - People have ceased to listen because the church has forsaken the basis of her authority.
 Denominations are accepting same-sex marriage and ordaining homosexuals to pastoral ministry because they have forsaken the Bible.
 2. If we reject Biblical truth, we have rejected its Author and our faith is demolished as a shipwreck on the rocks of doubt and uncertainty.
 3. If I stand here and tell you something from the Word of God you **MUST** listen, believe, submit, and obey.

- C. We must stand upon this faith – We must maintain gospel priority and integrity
1. Timothy was sent to Ephesus to contend for the truth. It was a serious and fierce warfare that demanded standing firm with courage.
 2. We must not allow the Gospel to be usurped by non-essentials.
 - a. We are always in danger of being distracted by other things
 - b. We must not argue with the lost about other issues while forgetting the Gospel. Politics may be interesting and challenging but it is not the Gospel.
 - c. We must not direct our focus only upon moral issues. Abortion is an important battle, but it must not supplant the Gospel.
 3. We need to be careful to continue to hold fast to Biblical truth and defend it valiantly as the soldiers of Christ the doctrines of the church that continue to come under attack—Biblical inerrancy, Justification by Faith alone, Salvation through Christ alone
 4. If we are to hold fast to and defend the faith as good soldiers we must know what we believe.
 Kent Hughes writes: “The sad truth for so many Christians is that their love of God languishes due to their lack of knowledge of him. They simply do not know much about God. They may have a relationship with him, but it is stunted by their ignorance of him. Evangelical ignorance is a fact. Most Christians cannot name the Ten Commandments. Many cannot even name five of them. Many do not even know where they are found. If we are to love God as we ought, we must know the doctrine of God, the doctrine of Christ, the doctrine of salvation, just to name a few.”²

II. The second essential element of our good warfare is a good conscience

- A. We must maintain both doctrinal integrity as well as moral purity
1. In the context Paul is maintaining his focus upon maintaining doctrinal integrity no matter what the outside pressure. Too many are willing to abandon their doctrinal principles for expediency and pragmatism.
 2. Sound doctrine must be accompanied by holiness. We must live the Gospel. Sound doctrine cannot be separated from sound practice. When we justify our sins to appease our conscience we will soon change our doctrines to support our bad behavior.
 3. Faith without moral integrity is a counterfeit faith
James 2:26 NAU - "For just as the body without *the* spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead."
 4. Right doctrine without holiness is intellectual and spiritual emptiness
- B. We are continually being bombarded by immorality and compromise
1. We must maintain the priority of holiness.
 2. We must maintain a Gospel focus and a Gospel priority. Only the Gospel will help our generation.
 3. We must maintain high standards as a church. The leaders of the church must be held to a high standard.

² R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 52.

- a. In **Chapter 3** Paul tells us both pastors and deacons must be held to this standard. Pastors must be above reproach.
1 Timothy 3:8-9 NAU - "Deacons likewise *must be* men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain,⁹ *but* holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience."
 - b. Paul stressed this to Timothy
1 Timothy 4:16 NAU - "Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you."
4. Our conscience must be free from the guilt of sin and compromise
 - a. This demands consistent obedience to sound doctrine and the demands of the gospel
 - b. Paul looked upon his own conscience with serious and honest examination and made it clear that his conscience was clear -
Acts 23:1 NAU - "Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day."
 - c. Guilt hinders our prayer life, stifles our assurance, weakens our witness.
 5. We must maintain a good conscience.
 - a. We must listen to our conscience.
 - b. Conscious disobedience crushes our spiritual life and destroys our prospects for fighting the good fight and winning the war.

Conclusion:

1. We must realize and acknowledge the fierce warfare in which we are engaged. There is a terrible spiritual war raging continually around us
Abraham Kuyper – "If once the curtain were pulled back, and the spiritual world behind it came to view, it would expose to our spiritual vision a struggle so intense, so convulsive, sweeping everything within its range, that the fiercest battle ever fought on earth would seem, by comparison, a mere game. Not here, but up there—that is where the real conflict is waged. Our earthly struggle drones in its backlash."³
2. The Biblical descriptions are terrifying
 - a. Satan is referred to as a "roaring lion"
 - b. His weapons are flaming arrows designed to inflict great suffering
 - c. His demons are shown throwing individuals into the fire
3. We must battle courageously without fear. We must fight the good fight maintaining faith and a good conscience.

³ Ferguson, Sinclair, *The Preacher's Commentary, Daniel*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988), 199.