

1 Timothy 1:18-20
How do we fight the good fight?

Introduction

1. One of the most stirring passages in the Bible for me is something Paul wrote shortly before he died
2. It comes in 2 Timothy 4:6-8 (READ)
 - a. Paul liked metaphors and earlier in chapter 2 called on Timothy to suffer hardship in ministry with him by using the examples of a soldier serving to please his commander, an athlete competing for a prize, and a farmer working hard to grow his crops
 - b. You may have noticed here in 2 Timothy 4:7 that Paul uses two more metaphors, that of a runner and another of a boxer, and he uses these to summarize his life and ministry: **“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course”**
 - c. He uses these same two metaphors in 1 Corinthians 9:26 to describe his diligence in ministry: **“Therefore, I run in such a way, as not without aim, I box in such a way, as not beating the air”**
 - d. It’s clear that Paul likened ministry on behalf of Jesus to competing in an athletic event where the goal was to compete nobly, finish successfully, and ultimately be awarded the prize
 - e. It shouldn’t surprise us then that Paul uses one of these metaphors to challenge Timothy to fulfill his mission of protecting the church at Ephesus from false teaching
3. Our passage today is 1:18-20 where Paul picks back up with his charge to Timothy and calls on him to **“fight the good fight”** (READ 1:18):
 - a. **“This command”** refers to the charge Paul had given Timothy referenced all the way back in vs. 3-4 (READ)
 - b. Paul had entrusted Timothy with this mission because he said it was **“in accordance with the prophecies previously made”** concerning him
 - 1) Paul doesn’t say here what these prophecies were, but we get a clue in 1 Timothy 4:14 and 2 Timothy 1:6 (READ BOTH)
 - 2) At some point, Paul and a group of other elders laid hands on Timothy, at which point prophecies were made about him (likely how he would be used) and he received his spiritual gift of preaching and teaching
 - 3) It was in accordance with these prophecies and Timothy’s spiritual gift for teaching that Paul knew he could trust Timothy to deal with the false teaching at Ephesus
 - 4) It was also these same prophecies and gifting that would enable Timothy to **“fight the good fight”** and carry out his mission
 - c. One of the things Paul does in this letter is to provide Timothy with encouragement on how he could successfully **“fight the good fight”**; there are four I’d like to cover this morning:
 - 1) The first is found in vs. 18-20
 - 2) The other three are found later in the letter; we’ll touch on these today but cover them in more depth as we come to them in their context over the coming weeks

A. In order to fight the good fight Timothy would need to keep faith and a good conscience (READ 18b-19a)

1. By keeping faith Paul is referring to remaining faithful to the doctrines and practices of the Christian faith, not just simple faith in Jesus Christ:
 - a. It's exactly the opposite of what the false teachers were doing by getting sucked into their different doctrines, myths, genealogies, speculations, and fruitless discussions
 - b. It's also the opposite of what Paul warned Timothy about in 4:1: **"But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons"**
 - c. Paul warned Timothy about this in 2 Timothy 4:3-4 as well (READ)
2. Keeping a good conscience goes hand in hand with keeping faith because one cannot have one without the other:
 - a. Back in our discussion of v. 5 we talked about the importance of keeping a good conscience
 - b. According to Hebrews 13:18, maintaining a good conscience is one of the things that causes us to conduct ourselves honorably, or in the right way, in all things
3. In order for Timothy to fight the good fight, he would need to keep both of these—the faith and a good conscience:
 - a. Back in v. 6 Paul wrote that some had strayed from these things and turned aside to fruitless discussions and false teaching
 - b. Here in v. 19 he says that some had rejected these things and shipwrecked their faith (READ 19b)
 - c. He even gives us the names of two such men (READ 20):
 - 1) The first person he mentions is Hymenaeus who, along with another individual named Philetus, taught that the resurrection had already taken place and in doing so upset the faith of some; Paul referred to their teaching as spreading like gangrene (2 Timothy 2:17)
 - 2) The other individual Paul mentions here is Alexander and we know a little more about him; he was a coppersmith and in 2 Timothy 4:14-15 Paul warns Timothy to be on guard against him because he vigorously opposed their teaching and did much harm to Paul (though it's not clear what kind of harm)
4. Takeaway: keeping the faith and a good conscience isn't just good advice for someone like Timothy; it's a warning for all of us:
 - a. In 1 Timothy 1:6 & 1:19 Paul said that those who stray from or reject these things suffer shipwreck in regard to their faith
 - b. In other words, if you stray from or reject sound Biblical teaching and doctrines and no longer maintain a good conscience in this regard, your faith is no good; it's empty
 - c. Paul warned in Colossians 1:21-23 that only those who **"continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel"** will be presented before God **"holy and blameless and beyond reproach"**
 - d. In other words, the ultimate proof of one's salvation is not what they claim, but remaining steadfast in their faith in Jesus Christ

B. A second thing Timothy would need to do to fight the good fight would be to discipline himself for godliness through the preaching and teaching of Biblical truth (4:11-16)

1. In chapters 2-3, Paul provides instructions for Christian conduct within the Church (e.g. how men and women are to behave, qualifications for elders and deacons)
2. In chapter 4 he describes how the Holy Spirit had indicated that a time will come when some will fall away, rejecting these Biblical truths and instead paying attention to **“deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons”** (4:1)
3. In the rest of chapter 4, Paul instructs Timothy on what it will take to be a **“good servant of Christ, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine”** which he had been following under Paul’s leadership (4:6)
4. The instructions are rather simple: discipline himself for godliness through the preaching and teaching of Biblical truth (4:11-16):
 - a. In 4:11, Paul called on Timothy to **“Prescribe and teach these things”**—a more literal rendering is, **“continue to command and teach these things”**; these things refers to the instructions Paul gave Timothy regarding Christian conduct in chapters 2-3
 - b. In v. 13 he tells Timothy to **“give attention to the reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching”**
 - c. In v. 14 he tells Timothy not to **“neglect”** his spiritual gift, which the context of the letter tells us is preaching and teaching
 - d. Paul concludes this section by describing the results of all this (READ 15-16):
 - 1) When Paul says to **“take pains”** and **“be absorbed”** in these things he is referring to Timothy practicing the very things he would be teaching and preaching
 - 2) This is evident from what he says in v. 16, **“pay close attention to yourself (how you apply them) and to your teaching (what you teach others)”**
 - 3) By teaching and preaching sound Biblical truths, and working hard at applying them himself, Paul ways that his progress (e.g. spiritual growth) would be evident to all and he would secure salvation both for himself and others
5. Takeaway: again, this isn’t just good advice for the preacher and teacher; every believer should discipline him- or herself for godliness by seeking out the preaching and teaching of Biblical Truth
 - a. Psalm 19 says that only the Word of God can help us discern our sins and acquit us of hidden fault, or keep us from presumptuous sins or let them rule over us
 - b. Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 **“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”**
 - c. I will say this unapologetically: without committing oneself to the learning and application of sound Biblical truths it is impossible to grow spiritually and pursue godliness

C. A third thing Timothy would need to do in order to fight the good fight would be to flee worldly wealth and pursue eternal things (6:11-12)

1. In chapter 6 Paul returns to his concerns over the false teachers, and brings up a new twist: some of them were apparently using religion as a means of financial gain
2. They longed for material and worldly wealth, and as a result **“wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs”** (9-11)
3. So, in vs. 11-12 Paul provides Timothy with a third thing he would need to do to fight the good fight (READ 11-12):
 - a. It wouldn’t be enough to simply flee from the love of money and pursuit of wealth

- b. Rather, he would need to **“pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness”** (11)
 - c. These are all things with eternal value which is why Paul calls on Timothy to **“fight the good fight and take hold of eternal life”** (12)
4. Takeaway: Jesus said in Matthew 6:19-21, **“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 “But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; 21 for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”**
- a. Paul challenged Timothy with this principle and warned him that if he wanted to fight the good fight he would need to flee the trappings of worldly and material wealth and instead pursue things of eternal value, treasures in heaven
 - b. So, the question we all need to ask ourselves is, What treasures are we storing up?
 - c. The answer to that question often lies in our heart because Jesus said, **“where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”**
 - d. Are we pursuing, as Paul warned Timothy, **“righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness”** or are we pursuing something that moth and rust can destroy?

D. A fourth and final thing Timothy would need to do in order to fight the good fight would be to guard Biblical Truth (READ 6:20-21)

- 1. To be entrusted with something means you are responsible for caring for it and protecting it
- 2. So, what exactly had Timothy been entrusted with?
 - a. Paul provides a very precise answer in 2 Timothy 1:12-13: **“13 Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. 14 Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.”**
 - b. This would be not just the Gospel, but all of the things Paul had taught Timothy, including the content of his letters
 - c. He refers to them as a **“treasure”** (love that word-picture) and something Timothy needed to guard **“through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us”**:
 - 1) One of the roles of the Holy Spirit, and this is especially true of the early Church, was to teach and guide them into the Truth (READ John 14:26; 16:13)
 - 2) In the same way, Timothy could rely upon the Holy Spirit to help him guard the sound words and Biblical truths that had been entrusted to him
 - 3) If we go back to 1 Timothy 6:20-21 we see that, in part, this would require that Timothy avoid those things that are **“falsely called knowledge”**
- 3. Takeaway: Paul charged Timothy with guarding what had been entrusted to him, the treasure of the Gospel and the Word of God, but every Christian has a role to play in this
 - a. Theologian Matthew Henry wrote, **“The Christian doctrine is a trust committed to us ... It is committed to us to be preserved pure and entire, and to be transmitted to those who shall come after us, and we must keep it, and not contribute anything to the corrupting of its purity, the weakening of its power, or the diminishing of its perfection.”**
 - b. All too often, when it comes to attending church, many Christians compromise sound Biblical teaching for other things

- c. Many never open their Bible's to study on their own so they have no capacity to evaluate what they are taught from the pulpit, read in books, or hear on the radio or TV
- d. The two best ways we can guard what's been entrusted to us are:
 - 1) Make sure we know what's in here and commit ourselves to it (the Bible)
 - 2) Make sure those we allow to teach us also know what's in here and are committed to it