



Did any of you click on the link to that song (“The Battle Belongs to the Lord”) in the WBC Post? I did, and I couldn’t help but smile as I saw the album cover of Petra Praise, which was released in 1989, the fall of my senior year in college. As I clicked on the link to the music video and listened to the 80’s version of this song, I wondered if Dave Mirabella was going to cut loose on the electric guitar this morning. Well done, music team!

The battle does belong to the Lord, and we are foot-soldiers in his army. Once in a while I’ll hear the kids upstairs here at church singing a song that I sang when I was a kid:

*I may never march in the infantry,
Ride in the cavalry,
Shoot the artillery.
I may never zoom o’er the enemy,
But I’m in the Lord’s army!*

At the end of 1 Timothy 1 (page 932 in the pew Bible), the apostle Paul reminds Timothy that he, too, is in the Lord’s army. In verses 18-20, Paul says,

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.

- 1 Timothy 1:18-20

If you’ve been with us for the last few weeks, you know that smack in the middle of this letter to Timothy, Paul tells him why he is writing: “so that ... 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 Tim. 3:14-15). *The truth of Scripture. The truth of the gospel.*

Near the beginning of the letter, Paul tells Timothy to *guard the gospel*. Why? Because “certain persons” were teaching a “different doctrine” that were drawing people away from the gospel into pointless discussions that produced controversy instead of genuine love, which is what the gospel always produces. Such love flows forth from “a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” – inner qualities that the Holy Spirit can produce by the power of the gospel. This is the gospel that had changed Paul’s life and destiny.

Paul celebrates this gospel by recounting his own testimony in verses 12-17. Paul thanks Jesus Christ for giving him the strength to serve God, because prior to his conversion, Paul was “a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent.” But Paul received mercy, and God’s grace overflowed for him. Why? Because “Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners,” and Paul considered himself the very worst of them. Paul says, in essence,

“If Jesus Christ saved me, then he can save anybody! Nobody is beyond the reach of God’s amazing grace!” And that’s why Paul ends his testimony on a magnificent note of praise.

But now Paul ends the chapter with a serious charge to Timothy. Paul impresses on him the importance to guard this gospel – this good news from God that is totally trustworthy and deserves full acceptance – this gospel that people need to hear and know and believe in order to be saved. This makes the truth of the gospel worth fighting for. This is Paul’s emphasis at the end of 1 Timothy chapter one:

The truth of the gospel is worth fighting for.

The strength of Paul’s conviction is evident by his exhortation to Timothy and his excommunication of false teachers

**Exhortation
(vv. 18-19a)**

Paul says, “This charge I entrust to you.” The Greek word for “charge” (*parangello*) is the same word that Paul used back in verses 3 and 5. It’s a military term that literally means “to pass commands from one to the other.”¹ Timothy the foot-soldier is getting his marching orders from Paul, the field general, who got them from the Commander-in-Chief, Christ himself (v. 1). In verse 11, Paul says God had entrusted him with the gospel, and now he is entrusting Timothy with the gospel. Both of these men, like all believers – and especially pastors and elders – are to guard the gospel. Doing so is not easy. It’s a fight.

This being the case, Paul encourages Timothy – he fortifies his faith – with two resources:

1. Paul’s support for Timothy

Paul says, “This charge I entrust to you, *Timothy, my child...*” (v. 18a, italics added). Back in verse 2, Paul referred to Timothy as “my true child in the faith.” When studying the backdrop of that verse a few weeks ago, we saw from the book of Acts that Paul may have led Timothy to Christ when Paul preached the gospel in the city of Lystra during his first missionary journey. We do know that when Paul returned to that city during his second missionary journey, Timothy had matured greatly in this faith and “was well spoken of by the [Christian] brothers” there (Acts 16:2). So, Paul took Timothy with him and the Lord blessed their ministry greatly. Timothy became Paul’s protégé, his faithful travel companion and co-worker. Over the years, Timothy had become like a son to Paul. But Timothy was also a soldier of Christ. Paul wants Timothy to know as he heads into battle, Paul has his back. Paul fortifies Timothy’s faith by assuring him of his support.

2. Prophecies previously made about Timothy

Paul says, “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*” Most likely, these prophecies were things said at Timothy’s ordination. In chapter 4 of

¹ Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 14, gen. ed. Leon Morris (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990, reprinted 2009), 71.

this same letter, Paul tells Timothy, “Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you” (1 Tim. 4:14). We can imagine what that moment was like as the elders laid their hands on Timothy and prayed over him predictively, saying things like “Lord, we thank you for saving Timothy and calling him to serve you. We know that you are going to use him in mighty ways as a teacher and preacher of your word. This man of God is going to be a faithful shepherd who loves the flock and will lead them in your truth. Fill him with your Spirit, O God! Empower him for this great work you have called him to do!”

Moments ago we heard from Bill Smith, our missionary to Papua New Guinea. Webster Bible Church also supports my cousin, John Fletcher, who was commissioned to go to Papua New Guinea in 1980. My uncle Harry, who pastored WBC from 1971 until 1981, preached John’s commissioning service. His text was John 1:6: “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.” Now, of course, that verse is referring to John the Baptist, but by way of application, my uncle used it to encourage and embolden John, a single man in his early twenties who was about to go to the other side of the world and live in a grass hut among the Kubo people, who had never heard of Jesus. [\[show pic\]](#)



Like John the Baptist, cousin John “came as a witness, to bear witness about the light” (John 1:7) – the light of Jesus Christ. During the dark and difficult days of ministry, John remembered what was preached and prayed over him at the time of his commissioning: “There was a man sent from God whose name was John.” [\[end pic\]](#)

In the same way, Paul reminds Timothy of “the prophecies previously made about [him], that by them [Timothy would] wage the good warfare,” i.e., “fight the good fight.” Recalling these prophecies would encourage Timothy in the battle he’s now facing.

God’s people need this kind of encouragement today. Life is hard, but God’s word gives us hope. It is the “word of [God’s] grace” (Acts 14:3, 32) that gives us strength for the battles we face.

The most critical battle believers face is the battle for gospel truth. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul calls it the message “of first importance (1 Cor. 15:3) – that “Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said” (1 Cor. 15:3b-4 NLT). This is the message on which we stand, and it is the message by which we are saved. And that’s why the gospel is the message that the enemy is always attacking, always attempting to twist or discredit.

So, after Paul gives Timothy two resources for fighting the good fight, those resources being Paul's support for Timothy and the prophecies previously made about Timothy, Paul then lists two requisites, two necessary qualities, for fighting the good fight. These requisites are "holding faith and a good conscience." These two qualities are joined three times in 1 Timothy (1:5, "a good conscience and a sincere faith"; 1:19; 3:9, "the faith").

- ⇒ Jude in his letter to fellow believers wrote, "I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we all share. But I found it necessary to urge you to defend the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3, slightly paraphrased). "The faith" is the Christian faith, the Gospel – everything that pertains to our salvation.
- ⇒ A survey of church history over the last two thousand years will show that there has never been a time when the truth was not under attack, "when God's people were not in danger of falling into error."² To fight the good fight, we must embrace God's truth and defend the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

And we're to do so with "a good conscience." A good conscience comes from a good life – from practicing what you preach. In verse 5, Paul talks about "a good conscience and a sincere [unhypocritical] faith" (v. 5). George Knight writes in his commentary,

A "good conscience" is a state in which one's moral self-evaluation accurately registers that one has been obedient to God.³

"Holding faith and a good conscience" are both necessary for fighting the good fight because they go hand-in-hand. John Calvin wrote, "A bad conscience is the mother of all heresies."⁴

That makes total sense. People who don't repent of their sin try to justify their sin. Instead of calibrating their conscience to Scripture, they calibrate Scripture to their conscience. Rather than change their ways, they change God's word or reject it altogether. When that happens, they've lost the fight. They've defected to the enemy. Such was the case with two men whom Paul mentions by name at the end of chapter 1.

Excommunication (vv. 19b-20)

"By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme (1 Tim. 1:19b-20). Having rejected the faith, "their testimony turned into the *Titanic*."⁵ Their ship was sunk! – and they were taking others down with them.

² Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*, Reformed Expository Commentary, New Testament edited by Daniel M. Doriani, series editors Richard D. Phillips and Philip Graham Ryken (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 49.

³ George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, eds. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992, paperback edition, 2003), 109.

⁴ John Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, trans. T. A. Smail, Calvin's Commentaries (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1964), 202. Cited by Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*, Reformed Expository Commentary, New Testament edited by Daniel M. Doriani, series editors Richard D. Phillips and Philip Graham Ryken (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 52.

⁵ Ryken, 53.

The first heretic Paul calls out by name is Hymenaeus, whom Paul mentions again in his second letter to Timothy, where he says that Hymenaeus “swerved from the truth” and was “ruining the faith of some” (CSB). The other heretic whom Paul names in 1 Timothy 1:20 is “Alexander. This may be the same Alexander that Paul mentions in 2 Timothy 4, where he says, “Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message.”

Because these men *rejected* the faith, Paul *ejected* them from the church. Most likely, these men were elders in the church. This fits with Paul’s warning to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20, where he warned, “some men from your own group will rise up and distort the truth in order to draw a following” (Acts 20:30 NLT). This is a sobering reminder for pastors and elders (including myself) that no one is immune to the temptation of twisting God’s word to gain a following. The same is true of deacons, small group leaders, and youth leaders. If we’re not careful, we can use our influence to seduce people into following us instead of following Jesus.

That’s a wicked thing to do, which is why Paul handed these men over to Satan. Although the details aren’t given, we know from other Scriptures (e.g. 1 Cor. 5:1-5; Matt. 18:15-20) that such a measure would have involved revoking their church membership and denying them Christian fellowship, including their participation in the Lord’s Supper. John Stott rightly stated, “Since the church is the dwelling-place of God, it follows that to be ejected from it is to be sent back into the world, the habitat of Satan.”⁶

Some have to be cast into the sea for them to realize the benefits of being on board the ship.⁷ This drastic measure Paul takes is not intended to be punitive, but restorative. It is so that “they may learn not to blaspheme.” The Greek term for “learn” (*paideuo*) refers positively to training and instruction. Church discipline is designed not to harm but to heal. It’s intended purpose is to get those who have wandered from the faith back on the right path while at the same time maintaining the purity of the church for the glory of God.

These men had to be taught not to blaspheme. That’s what non-Christians do. That’s what Paul himself did in his pre-conversion state: “formerly I was a blasphemer” (1:13). To blaspheme is to behave in a way that disrespects God by distorting his truth in word or in deed – and blasphemy usually involves both. That’s why blasphemers should be expelled from the church – to show that they are separated from Christ, with the hope and that they will return to Christ and be reconciled to the church.

Confronting people is hard. Putting them out of the church is even harder. Philip Ryken reminds us, “Ministry is not easy. But then, warfare never is. Christians must never forget that they are soldiers.”⁸

⁶ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus*, The Bible Speaks Today, NT series editor John R. W. Stott (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 58. Philip Towner notes that Satan, “the supernatural nemesis of God and the church (Mark 4:15; 1 Thess. 2:18) ... is here seen as serving God’s purposes by overseeing the chastisement of sinners (Job 2:6).” Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, gen. ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 161.

⁷ Philip H. Towner, *1-2 Timothy and Titus*, IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 59-60. Cited by Ryken, 55.

⁸ Ryken, 56.

Our teens and youth leaders participated in Word of Life's overnight REVERB event this weekend. We praise God for the 72 professions of faith after the gospel was preached. I participated in these same Word of Life events when I was a teenager. But what I found most helpful in my spiritual formation was my daily quiet time and the WOL Scripture memory packet that included verse cards for us to memorize. One Scripture passage made such an impression on me when I was twelve years old, that I made it my life verse. I memorized it in the King James Version. The reference is 2 Timothy 2:3-4, where Paul wrote to Timothy, "Thou therefore endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier." Even at the age of twelve, I knew that *the truth of the gospel is worth fighting for*.

By the grace of God, Paul remained in the Lord's army "until the end of his life. By the end of his second letter to Timothy" – the last canonical letter Paul ever wrote – he had become "a veteran of many campaigns. He writes the dying words of a general to his second-in-command:

"The time of my departure has come. I have *fought the good fight*, I have finished the race, I have *kept the faith*. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing."
- 2 Timothy 4:6-8

The other day I told Ruthie, "The older I get, the more I pray that the Lord would help me to finish well, to be faithful to the end." Because in the end, that's all that matters.