

"Spiritual Warfare" - 1 Timothy 1:18-20

This morning, I'm led to focus on three verses, just one sentence of holy scripture. I believe this one sentence sets the tone; it sets the theme for the entire letter. Paul, of course, wrote to Timothy to encourage him. Timothy had been given a specific task, a specific ministry.

As I urged you when I went into Macedonia—remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith. (1 Timothy 1:3-4)

Timothy was to stand in the breach against false teachers. Timothy was to protect the church in Ephesus from the lies of Satan. Timothy was called to engage in spiritual warfare.

We know that Jesus will not allow His Church to be defeated by the powers of darkness. He gave that promise to Peter and the rest of the disciples on the occasion of Peter's great confession. Jesus had asked: *"But who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16:15)* And Peter responded: *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:16)*

That was the right answer! And by the way, you need to be able to confess that right answer yourself. Are you able to say, from your heart, "Jesus, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"? "Jesus, You are my Lord and my God." Because that's what you need to do in order to be saved from your sins.

But in response to Peter's confession, Jesus said this:

Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. (Matthew 16:17-18)

Jesus will preserve His Church. But He will do so by means of human agents. Timothy was one of those human agents. So was the Apostle Paul. But every Christian is called to arms. Every Christian is called to engage in Spiritual warfare.

Let's go to our text now.

This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme. (1 Timothy 1:18-20)

Paul has given Timothy a charge. That is, a mandate, a comprehensive command. These are his marching orders. This command is not arbitrary by any means. Paul gave it in accordance with *"the prophecies previously made concerning you."* That is an interesting turn of phrase, and it has resulted in a bit of speculation among Bible scholars, but I don't think there should be any controversy over this. In Chapter 4, we read:

Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. (1 Timothy 4:14)

Timothy was ordained for ministry and confirmed by the elders of the church. Now these days, we have formal ordination committees. Various denominations have requirements

that must be met before someone is ordained into the ministry and once you are ordained, you get to be called “reverend”. I’m not particularly fond of that title because I don’t think anyone should revere me. I’d rather be called “pastor”.

But there should be some mechanism by which we approve and qualify spiritual leaders because some who desire to be pastors are not qualified. Some guys want to be pastors because to them, it looks like an easy gig. Or maybe they’re looking for some sort of esteem. Perhaps they love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the churches, and the best places at feasts, like the Pharisees of Jesus’ day. (Luke 20:46) The Church needs to filter those guys out.

There are others who have a sincere desire to serve, but they simply do not have the necessary spiritual gifts for the pastorate.

And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, (2 Timothy 2:24-25)

Not everybody has those gifts. So, the Church needs to have a mechanism to ensure that their spiritual leaders are spiritually qualified. That’s one of the things Village Missions does for its member churches. Our organization has a rigorous screening procedure.

But we know Timothy was spiritually qualified. He had the requisite gifts. He was confirmed by the eldership. And Paul reminds him of this because Timothy needed to go to war. This is not a physical war. This isn’t even a human war. This is a spiritual war.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12)

One of the reasons I picked the Hymn “O Church Arise” for this morning’s worship has to do with this very fact.

Our call to war to love the captive soul

But to rage against the captor.

We need to understand that our enemy is not the hoards of unbelievers in the world. They are prisoners of war and we need to do everything we can to free them. No, our enemy is Satan and he is a powerful enemy indeed. We can only be victorious if we follow the commands of our Captain. But if we cling to Christ, the victory will be ours.

You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. (1 John 4:4)

Timothy was to engage the enemy and we too are to engage the enemy, but we must do it in the right way. We must fight the battle using the weapons Jesus has provided. Paul tells Timothy that he must wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience, two characteristics: 1) Faith 2) A good conscience. Let’s take a closer look at each of those.

If Timothy is going to wage the good fight, he must hold on to faith. Now faith in this context really means the truth of the gospel.

I remember working with a man who was still an unbeliever. He kept telling me, “I have no use for religion.” He was coming to Christ, but at glacial speed. We were reading through the Gospel of John together and came to John 6:29.

Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." (John 6:29)

So, I said to him, "See, it isn't about religion at all; it is about believing in Jesus." To which he replied, "Okay. So, what do I have to believe?" That is such a good question! As a Christian, you need to know what you believe and you need to know why you believe it because the first thing Satan will attack is the truth of God's word.

Timothy had to hang on to the faith. Those core, essential doctrines of Christianity, what we call the "bulls-eye doctrines", doctrines you must be willing to die for. The authority and inerrancy of scripture. The transcendence and holiness of Almighty God. The total depravity of man. The wages of sin. The atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son. The necessity of God's amazing grace.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

And you too must hang on to the faith. So, get into your Bibles. You must cling tenaciously to the truth of God's word.

Timothy had to hang on tenaciously to the faith, but he also had to have a good conscience. In other words, it was necessary for him to walk the walk. We're not saved by our performance, but the way we conduct our lives should certainly reflect our faith in Jesus Christ. If Jesus is really your Lord, you need to let Him call the shots. Too often, we Christians play the hypocrite and Jesus says: *"But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say? (Luke 6:46)* A good warrior has to be obedient to his captain and nothing will undermine your testimony faster than living in a manner that brings shame to Jesus. It does matter how you live, how you behave.

Unfortunately, some in the Church have become casualties of the great spiritual war. Let's look at the phrase in verse 19 once again:

having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, (1 Timothy 1:19)

Paul has sort of shifted metaphors here. He's been talking about being a good spiritual warrior, but in verse 19, he shifts a bit and refers to the idea of sailing a ship. I like that, because I like boats. And I have a little experience with boats.

Back in our sailing days, our boat had a rudder that was controlled by a tiller in the cockpit. You push the tiller to the right, and the boat would steer to the left. Push it to the left, and your course would be altered to the right. (That's a little counter-intuitive to some folks, but it is the way that it works.) If you abandoned the tiller without tying it down or securing it, you would very soon be out of control. If the wind was blowing with any force at all, things could get dangerous. So, you had to mind the tiller if you wanted to avoid catastrophe.

With regard to the faith, your conscience is the rudder that guides your vessel into the safe harbor of everlasting rest. If we hang on to the truth as defined in the Apostolic witness, it is like we are minding the tiller of our lives. The Holy Spirit, speaking through the words of the Bible, keeps us on course.

In Ephesus, there were those who had abandoned the tiller of faith. The result was shipwreck and Paul even names names.

of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme. (1 Timothy 1:20)

Hymenaeus and Alexander were casualties of the spiritual war. Paul reminds Timothy that he delivered them to Satan. Well, that seems pretty harsh! The word translated “delivered” is *paradidōmi* (*παραδίδωμι*) which means “abandon to”. Why would he want to abandon anyone to the enemy? Intuitively, it just doesn’t seem right.

Sometimes, it is just not possible to rescue a shipwrecked individual without putting your own vessel in mortal danger. We’ve seen boats that have run aground. We’ve seen boats up on the rocks, and you want to help, but given the state of the sea and the danger that surrounds the wreck, it’s just not possible. Not only would you be unsuccessful, but you would end up being shipwrecked yourself. So sometimes, regrettably, you have to leave them behind.

What the whole phrase “delivered to Satan” means, is that these two individuals were put out of the church. Paul uses the same phrase in 1 Corinthians about a man guilty of unrepentant sexual sin.

... deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. (1 Corinthians 5:5)

But notice that the ultimate motivation is restoration. Paul took this radical action so ...

... that they may learn not to blaspheme. (1 Timothy 1:20)

These two guys were causing great harm to the Church. They were obviously teaching heresy. They had to be dealt with, but Paul’s prayer is that they would repent and be restored.

That needs to be our motivation too. We do need to protect the Church by applying church discipline in the manner specified by Jesus. But the goal is not revenge, or condemnation. The goal is restoration. We need to rescue as many individuals as possible from Satan’s clutches. That is why we wage spiritual war.

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints— (Ephesians 6:10-18)

There’s only one offensive weapon there, folks. It’s the sword of the Spirit. Gear up! Take your Bibles in hand and follow your Captain. There is a battle to be won!