

Proposition: Rather than being passive in the Christian life, we need to pursue two things according to 1 Timothy 1:18-20.

- I. It takes duty (18-19a).
 - A. Timothy had a command to keep (18a).
 - 1. Remember you are under orders.
 - 2. Remember what your orders are.
 - B. Timothy had a fight to fight (18b-19a).
 - 1. We must hold on to faith.
 - 2. We must hold on to a good conscience.
- II. It takes discipline (19b-20).
 - A. Not everyone who professes Christ holds on (19b).
 - 1. Some people abandon ship.
 - 2. In so doing, they shipwreck the faith.
 - B. When that happens, discipline must follow (20).
 - 1. The action is severe.
 - 2. The purpose is remedial, not punitive.

Application: What does this say to us?

- 1. We mustn't ignore the "warning light."
- 2. We must deal with root causes, not merely the symptoms.
- 3. We must resolve to pursue a holy life.

This summer we had the privilege to visit my brother at Malmstrom Air Force Base in Great Falls, Montana. Military life is quite amazing. The men and women in the armed forces learn a basic lesson early on. You are not your own. You exist for a purpose outside of yourself.

One evening while in Montana, my brother and his wife planned to have a special barbecue dinner with us. Matt and I were outside by the grill, when the phone rang. It was Captain So-and-so. There was a problem on base, and he was needed immediately. So Matt handed me the grilling tongs, and was gone. No questions asked, he reported for duty. That's the way it is when you're in the military. Your will is subservient to a higher purpose.

Is that not true of us who are followers of the Lord Jesus Christ? George Duffield, Jr. penned: "Stand up, stand up for Jesus, ye soldiers of the cross; Lift high His royal banner, it must not suffer loss; From victory unto victory His army shall He lead, till every foe is vanquished and Christ is Lord indeed."

This morning, the Word of God is going to talk to us about "The Fight Worth Fighting." If we know Christ, we are in a fight. What does it take to win?

The truth is, you cannot be passive and succeed in the Christian life. It's a battle. We who belong to Jesus Christ are in a battle.

Rather than being passive in the Christian life, we need to pursue two things according to 1 Timothy 1:18-20.

I. It takes duty (18-19a).

We've come to the end of chapter one in our study of 1 Timothy. It's a personal letter from the apostle Paul to his protégé, Timothy (1-2), who was on a pastoral assignment in Ephesus. In verses 3-7, Paul spelled out for Timothy his first task: he must silence those

***Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

in the church who were teaching false doctrine. Paul will mention the names of the ringleaders in our text this morning.

Apparently, the false teachers' tactics involved an improper use of the OT law, so in verses 8-11, Paul laid out God's intent for the law. That discussion led the apostle to mention the gospel (11), which in turn led him to share his own testimony (12-17), which is an amazing illustration of the power of the gospel.

So there's the context. Some proud church members in Ephesus were abandoning the gospel in favor of fanciful, man-made teachings loosely associated with the Mosaic law. It was Timothy's job as a local church trouble shooter to silence these men.

Would it be easy? No, but who said the Christian life would be easy? Was going to the cross easy for Jesus? There's no room for passivity for people who want to please God. It takes duty, as described in verse 18:

"Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction ['this charge,' KJV] in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight." The Christian life involves *duty*, which in Timothy's case was a twofold duty.

A. Timothy had a command to keep (18a). "This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy." Question--what charge, what instruction, what command is Paul talking about? One commentator (Hanson) suggests it refers to the letter as a whole "since the immediately preceding verses do not contain any charge."

But it does if you go back to where the "immediate" context began--to verse 3, "As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, *stay there* in Ephesus so that you may *command certain men* not to teach false doctrines any longer." That was the charge.

That was no mere suggestion. Those were General Paul's marching orders to Lieutenant Timothy. The term "instruction" [charge] was used in Greek for a military order. It's not open for discussion. It demands immediate and complete obedience.

Timothy had a command to keep. He had a duty to God and to God's church. Duty is something our self-absorbed culture knows little about. We hear lots about freedom and rights, but little about duty. What can you do to regain a sense of Christian duty? Remember two truths, the same two Paul reiterated for Timothy in verse 18.

1. *Remember you are under orders.* "I give you this instruction *in keeping with the prophecies once made about you* [KJV, 'the prophecies which pointed to thee']." An alternate translate could read, "the prophecies which pointed me to you (Kelly)." Paul calls to Timothy's mind some occasion in his past when church prophets revealed a message from God concerning Timothy's call to the ministry.

In the early church, there were prophets who received special revelation from God and passed it on to the church. For instance, in Acts 13:1-2 we read, "In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers...While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'" Thus, the Spirit revealed through the prophets His will for Paul and Barnabas to embark on a missionary journey.

In one sense, anyone who preaches God's Word is a prophet. He engages in *forthtelling* the revelation of God. But in the early church, prior to the completion of the NT canon, prophets also engaged in *foretelling*, that is, predicting what God would do in particular situations.

Such was the case with Timothy. Prophecies were made concerning him. When? Perhaps it happened at Timothy's ordination (1 Tim. 4:14 "Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you"). We don't know for sure what the prophecies were--but Timothy did. Perhaps it was announced that the Lord was going to use him in a significant way as a

leader in the church. Perhaps he was designated to be a special representative of the apostle Paul.

Whatever the prophecy was, this much we know. Timothy was under orders. We need to remember that, too. We are not our own, but have been bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:19), the precious blood of Jesus (1 Pet. 1:19). We have a Master who has a purpose for our lives. Like Timothy, we need to remember that we are under orders.

2. *Remember what your orders are.* In Timothy's case, his marching orders were clear--stay in Ephesus and shepherd the flock. Get rid of the wolves that have entered the fold, intending to harm the sheep.

Those were Timothy's orders. Do you know what yours are? Do you know what God's will for your life is? Are you doing it? Here's the second part of the duty.

B. Timothy had a fight to fight (18b-19a). "So that by following them you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience."

My parents also visited my brother this summer. While they were there my brother arranged for them to make a personal visit to one of the missile sites where he works. Of course, you don't just walk up to a missile site and say, "Hey, I'd like to take a look around, and maybe take some pictures if you don't mind!" Hardly! There are security measures to be met. Why? Because the threat of possible attack is always there.

Like Timothy, we are called to fight the good fight. The Christian life is hard. The ministry is hard. This isn't the only time Paul uses "fight" terminology to describe it.

In 1 Timothy 6:12, he repeats the command to Timothy, "Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called." In 2 Timothy 2:3-4, he continues, "Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs--he wants to please his commanding officer."

William Barclay is right when he states (51): "It is not to a *battle* that we are summoned; it is to a *campaign*. Life is one long campaign, a service from which there is no release, not a short, sharp struggle after which a man can lay aside his arms and rest in peace. To change the metaphor, life is not a sprint; it is a marathon race."

As did Timothy, we have a fight to fight. What does it take to win? We find the answer in verse 19 (there's an unfortunate verse break that blurs the connection). You'll notice the verse begins with a participle which is linked to the main verb "fight" in the preceding verse. If we want to stand in the fight, we must hold on to two things.

1. *We must hold on to faith.* "Holding on to faith," the text reads. What does it mean to "hold faith?" It's possible to understand faith here in a personal sense, that is, "Hold on to your faith, Timothy, your faith in Jesus. Don't let your personal trust in Him waver in the battle." Another interpretation (which I favor) is to view faith in an objective sense (as both Hendriksen and MacArthur purport). Faith is a reference to the Christian faith, the gospel, the Word of God. To hold on to faith means to hold firmly to God's truth, which is exactly what the false teachers in Ephesus weren't doing.

Indeed, the fact that the word *faith* here in verse 19 means *truth* is supported by 2 Timothy 2:17-18. There Paul mentions two false teachers (one of whom we'll meet in our text momentarily) and says, "Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus who have *wandered away from the truth*. They say that the resurrection has already taken place and destroy *the faith* of some."

If Timothy was to fight the fight, he needed to resolve to hold faith, to remain uncompromisingly loyal to the Word of God. If we're going to stand, so must we. And...

2. *We must hold on to a good conscience.* The magazine editor H. L. Mencken defined conscience as "the inner voice which warns us that somebody may be looking." And a man with a good conscience knows that somebody *is* looking.

Let me pose a question. Is your conscience *good*? A good conscience is the result of a pure life. Your conscience is a God-given device that reacts to your behavior. It can accuse or excuse you (Rom. 2:14-15). It can produce good feelings (like peace and contentment), when your behavior is good, or bad feelings (like shame and guilt), when behavior is bad.

By the way, there are two ways to get rid of guilt feelings. What are they? One is to stop sinning. Confess your sin to God, call it what He calls it, trust in Jesus' redemptive work, and experience God's cleansing, and the feelings of guilt will leave. That's one way, that's God's way. But there's another way to get rid of guilt feelings. It's to sin *more*. It's to violate your conscience over and over, to give way to your sinful desires over and over. If you do that, what will happen to your guilt feelings? They'll leave. Why? Because you've hardened your conscience so that it doesn't work right any more. But I must warn you, to do so will bring disaster--*guaranteed*. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; Whatever a man sows that shall he also reap (Gal. 6:7).

It's like when you're driving down the road and suddenly notice that the red light on your dash is blinking at you. You have a choice. You can say, "That crazy light! It hurts my eyes," and take a hammer and smash the bulb. There, your problem is gone, and your eyes feel better with that pesky light not flashing. Is that what you'd do? I hope not. The light's not the problem. It's your friend. It's trying to tell you you've got a real problem, that you'd better do something about your low oil level or your problems are going to just get worse!

Your conscience is like that blinking light. Your conscience can be a great help to you. But don't violate it. Hold on to it, to a good conscience. One more thing. Your conscience may not be working too well--because you've smashing the warning light too many times. Is there hope? Yes, if you will repent and turn to Christ, and resolve to submit your life to the standard of God's Word.

That's the charge Paul gave to Timothy. You've got a command to keep, and a fight to fight. Hold on to faith and a good conscience, Timothy. That's your Christian *duty*.

Isaac Watts once penned these words:

"Am I a soldier of the cross? A follower of the Lamb? And shall I fear to own His cause or blush to speak His name?

Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease, while others fought to win the prize and sailed through bloody seas?

Are there no foes for me to face? Must I not stem the flood? Is this vile world a friend to grace, to help me on to God?

Sure I must fight if I would reign, increase my courage, Lord! I'll bear the toil, endure the pain, supported by Thy Word."

What else must we pursue in the battle? First, it takes duty. We discover a second element in the second half of our text.

II. It takes discipline (19b-20).

How would you finish this sentence? "The greatest need of the American church today is for _____." Back in May I attended a conference at which John MacArthur spoke to more than a 1,000 American pastors. He filled in the blank with an answer that shocked nearly everyone. I know it did me, at first, that is. But the more I think about his assessment, the more I would have to agree.

Here's what MacArthur said, "The greatest single need in the church, and the greatest impetus to its growth and power is *church discipline*. The problem is, if the church won't

discipline unrepentant sin, it has manifest its disinterest in holiness. And holiness is where power comes from."

My first thought was, "The greatest need? We need the preaching of the Word, don't we?" Yes, we need the Word. *But*, a church can preach the Word in all its services, yet its willingness (or lack of willingness) to practice church discipline reveals whether it's truly committed to living the Word.

Now listen to Paul's remarks in verse 19-20, "Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme." What does these verses teach us about discipline? Two things, the first being this.

A. Not everyone who professes Christ holds on (19b). In the first part of verse 19, Paul exhorted Timothy to hold on to faith and a good conscience. In the second part we discover the sad truth that not everyone who professes Christ *does*. In fact, Paul says there were some people in the Ephesian church, two he mentions by name, who had "smashing the warning lights." Verse 19, "Some have rejected *these* and so have shipwrecked their faith."

The sad truth is that not every church member holds on. Some people do two things that Paul mentions in our text.

1. *Some people abandon ship.* Verse 19 (KJV) "Which some, having put away concerning faith." Here Paul changes from an army to a navy illustration. The participle means to thrust away, to reject, to abandon." What had "some" in Ephesus abandoned? They have rejected "these," that is, they have rejected what Timothy was commanded to retain in verse 19: "faith and a good conscience."

What had happened? Some people who called themselves Christians had stopped holding on to faith (that's doctrinal failure) and a good conscience (that's moral failure). They'd abandoned ship. Secondly...

2. *In so doing, they shipwreck the faith.* As verse 19 concludes, "Some have rejected these and so shipwrecked their faith." What does that mean? A better reading would be, "Some have suffered shipwreck in regard to the faith."

Notice it's *the* faith. As in 6:21, "Which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from *the* faith." That's similar to what 2 Timothy 2:18 said Hymenaeus and Philetus did, "Have wandered from *the* truth." If a person leaves *the* faith, it's evidence that something's wrong with *their* faith.

A good sailor doesn't discard the rudder (or he'll wreck the ship). In the Christian life, the rudder is a good conscience that submits to the Word of God. To chuck that is to shipwreck the faith.

Beloved, when a Christian tolerates unbiblical thinking and unbiblical living, he is wrecking his usefulness. Don't miss the connection here between moral failure and doctrinal failure. As Warren Wiersbe observes, "Bad doctrine usually starts with bad conduct, and usually with secret sin." E. F. Scott states (in Guthrie, 68), "More often than we know, religious error has its roots in moral rather than intellectual causes."

Apparently, Hymenaeus and Alexander were two of the men who deliberately rejected their good consciences in order to justify their ungodly lives. Indeed, not everyone who professes Christ holds on. Which leads to a second point.

B. When that happens, discipline must follow (20). KJV, "Of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered [NIV, "handed over"] unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme."

The text states, "Of whom" (KJV), or "among them" (NIV) which indicates that Hymenaeus and Alexander weren't the only ones guilty of shipwreck in Ephesus, but

apparently were the ringleaders. And Paul had already dealt with them. How? He "handed them over to Satan," that is, he kicked them out of the church.

We find the same expression in 1 Corinthians 5 in the case where a church member was living in gross immorality. Paul gave the church this charge (5:5), "Hand this man over to Satan, so that the flesh may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord." What was Paul commanding the church to do? Remove the unrepentant person from the church. How do we know? Verse 7, "Get rid of the old yeast." Verse 11, "I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral, or greedy...with such a man do not even eat." And verse 13, "Expel the wicked man from among you."

There are two things I notice about church discipline from our text.

1. *The action is severe.* The guilty parties were Hymenaeus [mentioned also in 2 Tim. 2:17 as guilty of teaching false doctrine] and Alexander [possibly the same man Paul calls "the metalworker" in 2 Tim. 4:4, a person who did him much harm]. Paul says he handed them over to Satan.

What does Paul mean when he says he "handed them over to Satan?" There are three basic possibilities (Barclay). One, Paul may be thinking of the Jewish practice of excommunication. As Barclay explains: "According to synagogue practice, if a man was an evil-doer he was first publicly rebuked. If that was ineffective, he was banished from the synagogue for a period of thirty days. If he was still stubbornly unrepentant, he was put under the ban, which made him a person accursed, debarred from the society of men and the fellowship of God. In such a case a man might well be said to be handed over to Satan."

Two, Satan is responsible for human suffering and pain in this world. To hand Hymenaeus and Alexander over to Satan was to subject them to the type of suffering he causes.

Thirdly, Paul might be saying that he barred the men from the Church and turned them over to the world. In the first century, there was a sharp line between the Church and the world. The hymnwriter asked, "Is this vile world a friend to grace, to help me on to God?" In our day, some seem to think the world *is* a friend to grace, and live with a foot in the church and a foot in the world. But not so in the first century. The Church was God's territory, the world was Satan's. To be barred from the Church was to be handed over to Satan's turf (there was no second church down the road that would take you in).

Perhaps there's a sense in which all three options were involved. To say Paul handed the two men over to Satan is to say he put them out of the church. He removed them from the protective umbrella of God's people, and put them into Satan's domain.¹

You say, "That's severe action!" It certainly is. But don't miss the intent of it.

2. *The purpose is remedial, not punitive.* "To be taught not to blaspheme." The motive in discipline is mercy. The goal is not brute punishment for punishment's sake. The goal is restoration. That's why the Bible presents church discipline as a good thing.

Unfortunately, we live in a society that views not only church discipline, but all discipline as bad. For instance, even the idea of disciplining children is mocked as being outdated, harsh, and unnecessary. We're told it's restrictive to insist on a behavioral standard. It cramps creativity if you do that with a child. We're told that a child has a

¹Warren Wiersbe explains, "When a Christian refuses to repent, the local fellowship should exercise discipline, excluding him from the protective fellowship of the saints, making him vulnerable to the attacks of Satan."

spark of unlimited potential inside which needs to be fanned into flame by allowing freedom of expression, not smothered by parental control.

If a child comes to Sunday School and refuses to sit down when asked to do so by the teacher, it's the teacher's fault for not knowing how to work with children. To suggest that a little one be held responsible, let alone disciplined, for such disrespect is unthinkable. The child needs to be *understood*, not *disciplined*.

And then the five year old becomes a teen, and then an adult. He grows up thinking that he has a right to do as he pleases, that no one has a right to hold him responsible for his actions. To him, discipline is bad.

The Bible is quite straightforward about the subject of church discipline. It's commanded and it's good. It's God's method for keeping the church pure *and* helping unrepentant church members come to their senses.

As you investigate the NT, you'll discover three sins that bring church discipline (MacArthur). One, doctrinal error (1 Tim 1; Galatians). Two, sins that destroy the unity of the church (Rom. 16:17; Tit. 3:10-11). And three, sins that destroy the purity of the church (1 Cor. 5). Here's a sampling of the biblical tests:

Matthew 18:15-17 "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector."

2 Thessalonians 3:14 "If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed."

Titus 3:10-11 "Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned."

Romans 16:17 "I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them."

Perhaps you're thinking, "This is serious stuff. How can one avoid being delivered to Satan for chastening? In terms of application here are three responses.

Application: What does this say to us?

1. *We mustn't ignore the "warning light."* Have you been violating your conscience recently? Right now, God may be trying to get your attention, and you're ignoring Him. Please stop. We mustn't ignore the warning light.

2. *We must deal with root causes, not merely the symptoms.* If the light is blinking, there's a reason. The reason is sin. The remedy is Jesus.

3. *We must resolve to pursue a holy life.* Is it your passion to live a holy life? Is it your passion to see this church be a holy church? Holiness doesn't happen. It takes duty. It takes discipline. May God help us.