

“WAGING THE GOOD WARFARE”

**I. Introduction**

- A. Near the end of the second part of John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, as the pilgrims draw closer to the Celestial City, they come across a man with a bloodied face who is holding a drawn sword.
1. When they ask the man his name, he replies, “I am one whose name is Valiant-for-truth.”
  2. He then explains that he has just stood his ground against three wicked men who offered him three choices: join them, turn back, or lose his life.
  3. When one of the pilgrims notes that the odds were stacked against him in that fight, Valiant-for-truth replies, “It is true; but little or more are nothing to him that has the truth on his side.”
  4. As is typical in Bunyan, that statement is then given Scriptural support, as Valiant-for-truth cites these lines from Psalm 27: “Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.” (Psa 27:3 ESV)
- B. The Bible frequently represents the life of faith by using the metaphor of war.
1. Our passage in 1 Timothy contains the first of four instances in Paul’s letters to Timothy in which he employs battle imagery to describe the Christian life and the Christian ministry.
  2. As we study this text today, we will consider three things that it teaches us about the warfare to which we are called.
  3. It tells us that waging the good warfare involves fulfilling a charge, holding faith and a good conscience, and handing some over to

Satan.

## II. Fulfilling a Charge

- A. Paul begins by telling Timothy, “This charge I entrust to you.”
1. The phrase “This charge” is referring to what Paul began to speak about back in verse 3.
  2. In those verses, Paul urged Timothy to charge certain people in Ephesus not to teach different doctrines.
  3. As for the term “entrust,” Paul used it previously in verse 11, where he spoke of the gospel as something with which he had been entrusted.
  4. Like Paul, Timothy is a minister who has been entrusted with with the gospel.
  5. And being entrusted with the gospel brings a dual responsibility: the responsibility of proclaiming that gospel and the responsibility of opposing anything that threatens the gospel.
- B. There are various situations in life where we entrust something that is precious to us into the care of someone else.
1. The most significant situation of this nature is when we entrust our child into another person’s care.
  2. It takes a lot of trust to do that.
  3. When we do, we expect the person to do their utmost to ensure the well-being of our child.
  4. This is a picture of what God has done in entrusting his gospel to his church.

5. There is nothing in all the world that is more precious than the gospel of Jesus Christ.
  6. It is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.
  7. If the gospel is neglected, or mishandled, or tarnished, or overshadowed, it is the salvation of mankind that is at stake.
  8. This is why Paul speaks elsewhere of the importance of guarding the good deposit that God has given to the church in the gospel.
  9. And while there is a sense in which this charge applies to all of God's people, it has a special application for the church's ministers and elders, who exercise spiritual oversight in Christ's church.
  10. This responsibility is what is emphasized when they are ordained and installed into their offices.
- C. When Paul speaks of the prophecies that were previously made about Timothy, he is referring to something that took place at Timothy's ordination.
1. There is another reference to this in chapter 4, where Paul says to Timothy, "Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you."
  2. As we consider this, we need to differentiate between the elements of this practice that were unique to the apostolic era and those that continue throughout the church age.
  3. Prophecy was a spiritual gift that was imparted to the church during the period when the apostles were setting forth the foundational testimony upon which the church would be build.
  4. This is made clear in Ephesians 2:20, where Paul says that the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets."
  5. We know that Paul was not speaking of Old Testament prophets in that verse because he says just a few verses later that "the mystery

of Christ... was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." (Eph 3:5 ESV)

6. Because the apostles and New Testament prophets were engaging in foundation-laying work, their office was no longer necessary when that work was completed.
7. That being the case, we can say that the prophecies that were given at the time of Timothy's ordination were unique to the apostolic period.
8. Nevertheless, the practice of elders laying their hands upon a man in order to set him apart for service in the church's special offices is something that carries over for the church in all ages.
9. It symbolically shows that no man should take church office upon himself, but should rather have his call officially recognized by the church.
10. In the words of our Book of Church Order, ordination "is the church's solemn approval of and public attestation to a man's inward call, his gifts, and his calling by the church." [XX.2]

### III. Holding Faith and a Good Conscience

- A. Paul next tells Timothy that he is to wage the good warfare by the prophecies that were previously made about him.
  1. We do not know the specific content of the words of special revelation that were given at the time of Timothy's ordination, but we do know from chapter 4 that they had to do with being given a spiritual gift to empower him for his ministry.
  2. That being the case, we can say that the basic principle from this text that applies to the church in all ages is that one of the key ways in which the church wages the good warfare is through the men who are called to serve in its special offices.

3. This is why the ordination and installation of church officers is such a solemn event in the life of a church.
  4. Having said that, it is also important to understand that waging the good warfare is not something that only has to do with the men called to the church's special offices.
  5. This is something in which the entire church participates.
  6. Listen to how this is expressed in our Book of Church Order: "The power which Christ has committed to his church is not vested in the special officers alone, but in the whole body. All believers are endued with the Spirit and called to join in the worship, edification, and witness of the church... The power of believers in their general office includes the right to acknowledge and desire the exercise of the gifts and calling of the special offices. The regular exercise of oversight in a particular congregation is discharged by those who have been called to such work by vote of the people." [III.1]
  7. In other words, every believer is called to wage the good warfare in the fight of faith.
  8. We do this at the individual level by making diligent use of the ordinary means of grace, as we see at the end of Paul's letter to the Ephesians.
  9. And here in 1 Timothy 1, we see that we wage the good warfare at the corporate level by calling qualified men to special office and by supporting them and submitting to them in the Lord as they carry out their work.
- B. It is of the utmost importance that we remember that we are engaged in a spiritual battle in this world.
1. While the Scriptures instruct us to live at peace with everyone as far as it depends on us, this does not mean that we are to make peace with the forces of evil that hold sway over this world.

2. When those who profess to be Christians do that, they are not really making peace.
  3. They are simply changing sides.
  4. As believers in Jesus Christ, we have been called out of the darkness into the light.
  5. We are called to live in the light, not taking part in the works of darkness but rather exposing them.
  6. We are not to follow the world when it calls good 'evil' and evil 'good.'
  7. We wage the good warfare by submitting to God's definition of what is good and right and true.
- C. This is what Paul is talking about in our text when he calls Timothy to hold faith and a good conscience.
1. A key component of being a Christian is recognizing that there is something outside of yourself that you have to submit to and hold on to.
  2. In this sense, there is a deeply conservative impulse to the Christian religion.
  3. I do not mean "conservative" in the political sense, although there certainly are many ways in which our faith should inform and give shape to our political views.
  4. Instead, I am talking about being "conservative" in the sense of seeing that the Christian faith is not something that we create and define for ourselves, but something that has been given to us and that is therefore to be preserved and maintained and passed on.
  5. In other words, it is something to which we owe our loyalty.

- D. Paul's use of the word "faith" in verse 19 could be referring to faith as the act of believing or to faith as the content of what we believe.
1. A case can be made for both, and it is possible that Paul has both in mind.
  2. Either way, the point is basically the same.
  3. Paul is saying that we need to persevere in our faith.
  4. We are not to be shaken by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.
  5. The world is always going to try to press the church into its mold.
  6. This calls for the exercise of discernment, so that we can recognize the particular ways our culture is trying to do this.
  7. Instead of being conformed to the world, we need to be built up in God's truth.
  8. This is the way to maintain a good conscience, a conscience that is in submission to God's revealed will.

#### IV. Handing Some over to Satan

- A. This brings us to the last part of our text, where Paul speaks of those who have rejected a good conscience and made shipwreck of their faith.
1. This is referring to the false teachers who were troubling the church in Ephesus, men who had arisen from among the elders there.
  2. As Paul foretold in Acts 20, these men showed themselves to be fierce wolves who were seeking to lead the flock astray.
  3. Paul says that these men rejected a good conscience.

4. He describes them this way because they were swerving from God's truth and teaching a different doctrine.
  5. They were promoting speculative genealogies in hopes of making themselves look clever.
  6. Whenever people replace the good deposit that God has entrusted to his church with something of their own devising, they are exchanging a good conscience for a false conscience.
  7. They are making themselves, rather than God, the measure of what is good and right and true.
- B. Paul says that this results in making a shipwreck of the faith.
1. This is a helpful image, as well as a sobering one.
  2. It tells us that the Christian life is akin to navigating a ship on a vast sea.
  3. Consider John Calvin's reflections on this image: "What is human life, and what is the whole of its course? A navigation. Not only are we travelers, as the Scripture tells us, but we have... no solid footing. We are like people who are in a boat, and who are always within half a foot of their death; and the boat is a sort of grave, because they see the water all around, ready to swallow them up... [W]hat shall become of us when we have not a good boat or a good pilot?"
  4. The only good pilot is God, and the only good boat is his revealed truth.
  5. If we reject God and his truth, we will make shipwreck of our faith.
- C. This is what happened in the case of the two men whom Paul mentions in verse 20, Hymenaeus and Alexander.
1. Paul mentions them again in 2 Timothy.

2. There we are told that Hymenaeus was saying that the final resurrection of the dead had already happened, and that Alexander did Paul great harm.
  3. Whatever the specifics, it is clear that these men were swerving from the truth and promoting falsehood.
  4. They would not have seen matters that way, but it is what they were doing.
  5. And notice that Paul mentions them by name.
  6. This reminds us that those who bring harm to the church need to be called out and identified, lest they do even greater harm.
- D. Our passage concludes with Paul saying that he has handed these two men over to Satan so that they may learn not to blaspheme.
1. We find something similar to this in 1 Corinthians 5, where Paul instructs the church in Corinth to deal with a church member who was unrepentantly engaging in a scandalous sin by handing him over to Satan.
  2. This is a reference to excommunication, which is the official removal of a believer from the roll of the visible church as an act of judicial discipline.
  3. The reason why it is described as being handed over to Satan is because being cut off from the church means being returned to the domain of darkness.
  4. Those who do not belong to the church belong to the world, and Satan is the ruler over the present darkness of this world.
  5. Notice, however, that the action that Paul describes here has the restoration of the offenders in view.

6. He says that the purpose of this excommunication is to teach these men not to blaspheme.
7. This tells us that the goal in church discipline, even when it reaches the extreme stage of excommunication, is to see the offender brought to repentance so that he might be restored to fellowship.
8. That doesn't always happen, and it is not the only or supreme purpose of discipline.
9. The ultimate goal in church discipline is to uphold the glory of God.
10. Nevertheless, our desire is always to see the offender restored.

## V. Conclusion

- A. This passage reminds us that to be a Christian is to be engaged in a great spiritual battle.
- B. The only way to prevail in this fight is to be valiant for truth.
- C. The same point was made in the days of Isaiah when the southern kingdom of Judah was threatened by a military alliance between Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel.
- D. Isaiah tells us that when King Ahaz and the people of Judah learned of this threat their hearts shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind.
- E. The Lord responded to this by telling Ahaz through Isaiah that he is not to fear because the Lord will not permit this alliance to prevail over Judah.
- F. Isaiah's message ended with these words: "If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all." (Isa. 7:9)
- G. This is just as true today as it was back then.

- H. That being the case, let us make sure that we always hold fast to Jesus Christ, for he alone is our firm foundation.