



Text: 1 Timothy 1:18-20¹

Series: Living the Gospel

Title: Part 4 -- How to Fight for the Gospel in our Lives ... And Why We Must!

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The Bible uses several different word pictures to describe the Christian life. Sometimes, it's described as an athletic contest. For example, Paul says of his own spiritual life...

“But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 3:13-14

Sometimes, it's described using a picture taken from agriculture. Believers are spoken of as “sheep” and the role of the pastor is the shepherd them. (Acts 20) The task of sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ is spoke of as “sowing seed” (Mark 4) and the encouragement we're given is that if we sow the spiritual seed of godly action in our own lives (Galatians 6)...

“...in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.” Galatians 6:9

But one of the most frequent and most developed pictures used to describe the Christian life is that of warfare. In Ephesians chapter 6, Paul lists in great detail the armor that the Christian soldier is to wear. The picture he paints seems to fix itself in our minds and as we recite or recall the pieces of that armament our mind's eye re-constructs a soldier dressed with...

“the belt of truth ... the breastplate of righteousness ... shoes [of] the gospel of peace ... the shield of faith ... the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” Ephesians 6:14-17

Paul speaks of the warfare in which we are engaged in spiritual terms, not in terms of human politics and military might. He wrote...

“For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ...” 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

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The sword that the Spirit wields is God's Word of truth; it isn't guns or tanks nor is it the executioner's rope nor the force of civil law. Our warfare is conducted against ideas and beliefs that rob God of his glory, that incite rebellion against his sovereignty and that oppose the message of his Gospel. We are in a war for truth and Paul challenges Timothy to...

"...wage the good warfare...." 1 Timothy 1:18

Here's Paul's word to Timothy and to us about waging the good warfare.

¹ Timothy 1:18 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.

Although Paul calls our struggle "the good warfare," it rarely feels good. Warfare is hard. Paul calls on Timothy to...

"Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus." 2 Timothy 2:3

It's called "the good warfare" because it's for the good of the Gospel. It's called "good" because the Gospel brings us the greatest good, our eternal peace and forgiveness. It's called "good" because it's a battle for the glory of God. But it's hard.

In fact, it's so hard that many believers are tempted to simply not show up for role call. We stay in our tents; we let others do the fighting. We avoid conflicts for truth because, well, people get upset when we disagree with them. They get "offended" when we tell them Gospel truths about their sin, about God's judgement against their sin and about how Jesus is the only way to find God's forgiveness for their sin. They call us "narrow minded" and that upsets us. They ask us questions we can't answer and we feel embarrassed and vulnerable. We don't like the way we feel when we're "at war." It's uncomfortable. It's exhausting.

Listen, I understand! I'd rather think of the Christian life as "running a race" or "planting seeds" ... but the fact is that that is not all that there is to it! We are soldiers in a battle and we simply can't refuse the call to arms! If we are followers of Jesus, sometimes that means following him into battle for the truth. Faithful disciples of Jesus simply can't "sit this one out."

If we're going to "wage the good warfare" we need to remember that...



All of God's people are under orders to proclaim the Gospel as "soldiers of the cross"

Paul wrote to Timothy...

"This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child..." 1 Timothy 1:18

The word translated as "charge" is drawn from the world of the military. It literally means "command."

First of all, I want you to **notice who the commander is**. Notice that Paul is not "commanding" Timothy; he's entrusting a command to Timothy. Paul is not the commander. Both he and Timothy are under orders. To whom? It's to Jesus Christ. Jesus said...

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." Matthew 28:18-20

Did Jesus give this command only to apostles like Paul and pastors like Timothy? No. He gave it to every one of his followers. He gave it to you and to me. Every one of us is under orders to Jesus Christ.

Second, I want you to **notice what the command is** that Paul is entrusting to Timothy. It's the command to preach and teach the truth of the Gospel.

There were spiritual leaders in Timothy's church who were getting off track from the Gospel and Timothy had to go to battle against them for the truth. Back in verse 3, Paul told Timothy...

"As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge [ie. command] certain persons not to teach any different doctrine" 1 Timothy 1:3

Our commander, Jesus Christ, has issued an order that we are to share a message of truth with people about who he is and what he can do for anyone who comes to him in faith. The Apostle Peter described Jesus' command to him this way. He said...

"[Jesus] commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." Acts 10:42-43



Some years ago, the pastor of the church I attended devised an outreach plan for our community. It was pretty simple. It involved knocking on doors and handing out invitations to our Easter worship services where he was going to present the Gospel. I took an assigned group of houses but can remember delaying doing my “duty” for as long as I could; I remember swallowing hard as I walked up to the doors; I remember my sweaty hands and the swirl of my thoughts and fears; I remember all of it as if it was just yesterday, even though it was decades ago.

As I went down the street, the words of an old hymn came to mind and it buoyed up my sinking courage...

**“Am I soldier of the cross, a foll’wer 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 flow’ry beds of ease
While others fought to win the prize
And sailed thru’ 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.”²**

I wasn’t going door to door to please my pastor or do what he told me to do. I was doing it because I was under orders from Jesus Christ. I’m under orders from Jesus to speak the Gospel. And if you’re a follower of Christ, you are under the same orders. Brothers and sisters, we can’t sit this one out!

But not only has our commander has given us an order, but he also gives us his encouragement.

Our Commander encourages and strengthens us for battle

It was July 1, 1916. It was a battlefield in northern France near the city of Amiens. It was the first day of what came to be called the Battle of the Somme.

My grandfather, Corporal Joseph Reilly of the Royal Inniskilling Fusilliers, led his section of eight men into battle that day. Seeing his men being mown down by an enemy machine, he took action. He crawled along a slit trench near the gun,

² Isaac Watts, “Am I a Soldier of the Cross?”



and when he got into range, he stood up and threw a grenade into the gun emplacement, killing some of the gunners and wounding the others.

He captured the machine gun and then turned it to fire on the enemy and eventually expended all the ammunition available. Then for the rest of that very long day – remember, it was July 1st and the sun rose very early that day and didn't set until very late in the evening – he crawled out into “No Man's Land” and under fire he scavenged grenades and any other ammunition he could find with which to bombard the enemy positions.

Some time during that day, spent and exhausted from battle, he had a vision. I don't know if what he told me happened only within his own spirit and mind or if it was a vision that literally presented itself to his eyes, but what he told me was that he saw an angel of the Lord walking towards him across the battlefield. The angel spoke to him and simply said, “Fight on faithful soldier.”

In the strength of those few words, he did. He fought on, later receiving the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM) for his action that day. You see, sometimes, all we need to keep on fighting are a few, encouraging words.

Paul reminded Timothy of some “encouraging words” that had been God's gift to him for such a time as this. He encouraged Timothy to remember...

“the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare” 1 Timothy 1:18

We don't know what those prophecies were. It's likely that they were words spoken over Timothy on the day he was ordained to the ministry of the Gospel. Later in this letter Paul prods Timothy to get active in his teaching and leadership by reminding him of the day he was set apart for the work of the Gospel. Paul wrote...

“Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.” 1 Timothy 4:14

Picture that moment in Timothy's life. He is surrounded by the elders of the church. They are praying for him. They are speaking words of blessing over him, acknowledging the work that the Holy Spirit was doing in his life and sensing the work to which God was calling him. Then several of the elders, moved by the Holy Spirit, speak to Timothy in much the same way that Ananias spoke to Paul on the day he was commissioned by God to preach the Gospel. (Acts 22:12-15) The elders speak about the way in which God will use Timothy in the work of the Gospel and about the struggle he will face, but also about the grace that God will provide to enable him to endure and to prevail. Whatever it was they said to him, Paul reminded Timothy that those words were from God and they were words to strengthen him for the battle in which he now found himself.



The gift of prophecy, as Paul tells us, is used by God in the lives of his people...

“for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.” 1 Corinthians 14:3

And that’s exactly what Timothy needed. I want you to notice that Paul doesn’t proclaim a new word for Timothy. He called to mind a word that had already been spoken to him, probably many years before.

Over the years, I’ve received a few words from the Lord that have given me strength. I received one from a retired pastor on the day I preached my first sermon. It has been a treasure to me over the years. He spoke to me about the gift for preaching God had given me and encouraged me to develop it. What you need to know about what he said to me that day is that he had never heard me preach. I believe that the Holy Spirit was speaking encouragement to me through that man’s words.

I received another encouraging word from my pastor when I became a member of Benton Street Baptist Church in Kitchener. It was a verse of Scripture that he gave me, the same way I give verses to everyone who becomes a member here at First Baptist Church. Some years later a friend rendered it into calligraphy and had it framed. It hangs above my desk as a constant reminder of God’s directive for me as his soldier and servant to stay the course of teaching and preaching God’s truth.

It’s dated December 3, 1978 and this is what it says...

“Ye shall observe to do therefore as the LORD your God hath commanded you: ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. Ye shall walk in all the ways which the LORD your God hath commanded you, that ye may live, and that it may be well with you...” Deuteronomy 5:32-33 (KJV)

Over the years this word has been burned into my spirit. It has become a watch word for my soul. There have been many times in the last thirty years that I’ve been enticed to turn to “the right hand,” to the unbiblical traditions of conservative Christianity, and there have been other times I’ve been urged to turn to “the left” hand, to the unbiblical inventions of liberal Christianity, and this verse has stayed my course. There are those within this church and within our denomination that want me to turn right and there are those who want me to turn left and I tell you all today ... this soldier won’t turn! I have a word from my Commander and I will obey my orders!

There are times when I’m reading the Bible and a verse or a thought hits my heart in such a way that I know that God’s Spirit is bringing it to my attention for a very specific reason. Often it addresses something I’m dealing with at the time



and sometimes it speaks to something I'm about to deal with but don't know it yet. But I take it as an encouraging word from the Lord for me for that day.

Some of the words I've received from others have been spiritual truths applied to my life. Some of them have been Scripture verses that were directly applicable to me. But in all of them I have heard God's word of "upbuilding, encouragement and consolation."

Let me say, I am grateful for new words of encouragement I receive from others. I got one on Saturday in an email that strengthened and encouraged me; it brought tears to my eyes and fresh strength to my spirit. You see, I believe that our Commander speaks words of encouragement and strength to his troops. Why does he do it? Because just a few words are sometimes all we need to keep in the fight!

If we're going to hear God's encouragement to us, whether it's in the Bible or the words of a godly friend, one of the things we need to do is to keep ourselves in a state of preparedness. Paul gave some direction to Timothy on how to maintain a "battle-ready" preparedness. He directed him to...

"wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith" 1 Timothy 1:18-19

If we want to keep ourselves from being sidelined in battle, we need to remember that...

The fight for our own spiritual integrity is one of the key battles of "the good warfare"

One of the recurring themes in Paul's letters to Timothy is the theme of personal integrity. When Paul challenges Timothy to engage in warfare, he always reminds Timothy that one of the most intense battlegrounds will always be found in his own heart. Later in this letter Paul challenges Timothy to...

"Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers." 1 Timothy 4:16

The writer of Proverbs gives similar counsel:

**"Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life."
Proverbs 4:23**

A "good conscience" is a key barometer of our spiritual integrity but please understand what a good conscience is and what it isn't. Charles Stanley's "In Touch" magazine carried this good counsel about our conscience.



Many people mistakenly see conscience as God's voice instead of God's gift. We were created with an "inner monitor" that acts as our moral compass for life; it points to a standard of right and wrong that can guide our actions and decisions. But the conscience, like everything else in us, is fallen and in need of redemption. Depending on how it's been "programmed," our conscience even has the potential to nudge us in the wrong direction.

Paul himself is an illustration of this. His formal education as a Pharisee had taught him that Christians were a threat to God and the Jewish faith. His conscience had been programmed to see killing them as a service to the Lord. So he passionately hunted believers down without tripping an alarm on his moral compass. Only after the risen Christ met him on the way to Damascus was his conscience transformed and his life course altered.³

When we come to faith in Jesus, God's Spirit does a work of transformation in us that makes our conscience responsive to what God says to us. But sadly, our conscience will become dull and unresponsive to God's voice to the degree to which we tolerate sin in our lives. The Bible refers to that as a "seared" conscience. (1 Tim 4:2) If we persistently refuse to listen to the promptings of the Spirit, there comes a day when our conscience no longer awakens us to our spiritual danger.

This is how that process of searing worked in one man's life. He wrote...

During my college years—in my infinite wisdom—it occurred to me that it made no sense to stop at red traffic lights when there was clearly no traffic around. So I began to stop only briefly—just long enough to check for cars—and then proceed. My stops became shorter and shorter, and eventually I no longer stopped at all. I simply checked out the landscape well in advance and—if no cars were coming—proceeded full speed through the red light.

One day something changed all of that, and I've never run a red light since. I was approaching an isolated light in an area where there was rarely traffic in the busiest of times. I had already checked out the landscape and was near the empty intersection when a car topped the hill to my left. It was too far away to pose any threat, but it did pose a problem: it was a police car. But that is not what changed my ways, because I got the car stopped and received no more punishment than a dirty glance.

What scared me enough to put an end to that practice was what occurred in the split seconds between spotting the patrol car and getting the car stopped. In that instant, my foot moved from the gas pedal to the brake pedal, and then back to the gas pedal! I did not will it to do that; my foot just did it. My foot did that because that is how I had trained my mind to respond. I had continually ignored

³ "Avoiding Shipwreck," In Touch, September 7, 2007



*what had once been a clear signal to stop—a red light—and as a result that signal was no longer clear.*⁴

We can train our conscience and our spirit to ignore God's warning signals to us in his Word. We can read clear declarations of God's will but if we train ourselves to read around them or over them, or simply to avoid reading them at all, pretty soon what was once a clear signal is no longer clear.

There were two men in Timothy's church who had ignored the signals for a long time and they had paid the price in their spiritual lives. Paul said of them that...

“some have made shipwreck of their faith, Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.”
1 Timothy 1:19-20

The warning these two men provide for us is that...

We must engage in “the good warfare,” not only for the sake of the Gospel, but also for our own sake!

These two men had lost the battle for the Gospel in their own hearts. They had not been keeping watch over their own hearts and now it was time for some serious discipline. But even in this warning, there is encouragement.

Please understand that being “handed over to Satan” means that Paul had been responsible for removing them from the church, not that he had decided their eternal destiny. In fact, the whole point of their exclusion from the church was to teach them through what one Bible scholar (Kent Hughes) called “a severe grace” not to utter blasphemous falsehoods about God. They were set outside so that they might hunger to return to the truth about Christ and to true fellowship. The purpose for this discipline was redemption not destruction.

In 1 Corinthians there is a very similar expression. The church there had to deal with a believer who had engaged in a very public sexual sin and had refused to repent of it. Paul told the church they there were to “deliver this man over to Satan” (1 Cor 5:5) and what it essentially meant, as he explained later, was that they were not to associate with him in any way, not even to eat with him. He was to be placed “outside” the fellowship of believers. (1 Cor 5:9-13) Inside the fellowship of believers, Christ was shared; outside the fellowship of believers was Satan's territory (cf. Acts 26:18) and the hope was that the cold and dark of Satan's domain would give the sinner a longing for the warmth and light of the fellowship of believers.

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Sometimes it works (cf. 2 Cor 2:5-11); sometimes it doesn't.

*In the late 1940s, Charles Templeton was a close friend and preaching associate of Billy Graham. He effectively preached the gospel to large crowds in major arenas. However, intellectual doubts began to nag at him. He questioned the truth of Scripture and other core Christian beliefs. He finally abandoned his faith and made an unsuccessful attempt to persuade Billy to do the same. He felt sorry for Billy and commented, "He committed intellectual suicide by closing his mind." Templeton resigned from the ministry and became a novelist and news commentator. He also wrote a critique of the Christian faith, *Farewell to God: My Reasons for Rejecting the Christian Faith*, in which he documents his drift from faith as well as his intellectual objections to the Christian message.*

*Journalist Lee Strobel interviewed him for his book, *The Case for Faith*. Templeton was 83 and suffering from Alzheimer's disease, and still adamant in his rejection of the Christian faith. Strobel ... asked him about Jesus and was surprised at the response. Templeton said:*

"[Jesus] was the greatest human being who has ever lived. He was a moral genius. His ethical sense was unique. He was the intrinsically wisest person that I've ever encountered in my life or in my readings. He's the most important thing in my life. I know it may sound strange, but I have to say I adore him! Everything good I know, everything decent I know, everything pure I know, I learned from Jesus. He is the most important human being who has ever existed. And if I may put it this way, I miss Him.

Strobel said that Templeton's eyes filled with tears and he wept freely but he refused to say more.⁵

"I miss him." No church needed to remove Charles Templeton; he placed himself on the outside of the fellowship of Christ. "I miss him." What desperate, lonely, despairing, cold words. In the battle for the Gospel in his conscience Templeton had surrendered to the enemy and he had paid the price in his spirit. "I miss him."

In just a few moments we're going to remember the death of Jesus Christ for us. In Paul's instruction on the keeping of this memorial there is a word to our consciences. Each time we remember the Lord's death we are invited to reflect on our heart condition.

I'm going to read Paul's word to us and then I'm going to ask our musicians to play quietly for a minute or two allowing us time to reflect and pray.

⁵ © 2010 PreachingToday.com & Christianity Today International Lee Strobel, *The Case for Faith* (Zondervan, 2000), pp. 7-23



- **Invitation to the Lord's Table** – “conscience check” **1 Cor 11:23-32**
- **Songs of Communion**
 - Am I a Soldier of the Cross? #728
 - Be Strong in the Lord #734
- **Benediction** – Jude 24-25