

The Pillar (Part 6 of 6)

Fight the Good Fight of Faith

1 Timothy 1:18-20

Joe Bartemus

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, holding faith and a good conscience. 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 Timothy 1:18-20 ESV)

God has really blessed us with our new facility. It is a great place to worship as a community. This sanctuary is wonderful with very nice seats, great sound system, and clear sight lines. We have said before that one of our goals here is to make the entrance and environment of the sanctuary very easy and comfortable but the exit from the sanctuary will often be one of discomfort, challenge, and possibly conviction.

The passage for this week is one of those challenging and convicting passages. Last week, Pastor Mark led us through one of the most uplifting passages in the entire Bible. Paul affirms, as do we, that we are recipients of mercy and grace (1:13-14) because "Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief."

The text last week ended in one of the greatest doxologies in the Bible affirming "the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen!"

That passage - just quoted - should encourage and motivate the hearts of all the redeemed. Hallelujah, what a Savior! Now we come to the passage of this morning and the tone changes. Paul is going to make us uncomfortable. Hang on to the cushy seats, the great sound and keep your eyes open with the clear sight line. Paul is about to "rock" our worlds. The language of the text will move toward warfare and Paul will share two important realities of Christian warfare.

Two Realities of Christian Warfare

War Reality #1: The Charge to the Soldiers: We Are At War! (1:18-19a)

Paul begins this short paragraph by telling Timothy that "this" charge is entrusted to you, Timothy. What is the charge? He will restate it later in the verse, but the word "charge" is not new to the letter. In verse three, Paul uses the same word as he tells Timothy to "charge" the false teachers to clean up their act of teaching error. The idea there seems to be a charge to hold fast to the faith which is founded on sound teaching and doctrine. In verse five, Paul uses the word again to tell

Timothy that good doctrine without love is a formula for failure in ministry. Love is crucial and it is to be love from a pure heart, good conscience, and sincere faith (this verbiage will come up in our text as well). That seems to be the charge of Paul to Timothy: defend the faith and do it with love!

Paul then reminds Timothy of the prophecies “previously made about you.” I am sure this is not some mystic looking into a crystal ball and seeing his future. It may well be the laying on of hands with the elders affirming his call to ministry (4:14) - similar to what we did with Dale Shaw last week. This charge is now clearly stated and it is stated in simple terms: “Wage the good warfare.”

Paul is a master at metaphors. Metaphors are figures of speech that use a figure that is different from what is being discussed to bring out some of the important realities of the point at hand. Paul elsewhere used the metaphor of a race to describe the Christian life (2 Tim. 4:7). He also uses a wrestling metaphor in Eph. 6 to describe the battle with evil forces in the world. Here he wants Timothy to know (what he already knew) that the Christian life and ministry is not a “cake walk” but it is a real battle and war. It is not for the faint hearted or the fearful. It is a real battle and the soldiers must be prepared for combat. In essence, Paul is calling Timothy to take arms and be prepared for war. Paul then gives two important action points in reference to the call to arms.

Action Point #1: The Charge to the Soldiers is “Hold On To Faith”

Paul had mentioned this same point in verse two. Paul says that the battle will be fought for the faith. What is at stake is faith. It is not merely fight to keep our honor or to protect our land or loved ones. It is a battle for the eternal faith. It is a war of **faith**.

Now what does that mean? The word “faith” can also be translated as “trust” and “belief.” In our current English vocabulary, faith is seen as an abstract, internal force that is very hard to define. In the Bible, “faith” is always defined in its object. The object of faith in the Bible is always God as revealed in his Son, Jesus. The faith is the trust and belief in this God who sends Jesus into the world to save sinners. The battle is for the souls of men whose souls have hope only in trusting in the savior of the world. The battle is really a matter of life and death. There is no greater need than the need to hold on to faith, realizing that the battle will rage to give up and reject the faith.

Action Point #2: The Charge to the Soldiers is “Hold a Good Conscience”

Again, Paul mentions this concept in verse 2. This good conscience is an interesting concept. Paul is not just calling Timothy as a soldier to defend the faith as an intellectual affirmation of a confession of faith. This conscience issue is going to the heart of the matter. He is saying that Timothy must stand up for the faith and then live the reality of the faith. The conscience is the “seat of moral decisions”. The battle is not just for the claims of faith - it is for the living out of those claims. So the question becomes this: do you believe in Jesus? Do you live like you believe in Jesus? Do you reject the claims of Jesus? Do you sear your conscience and live any way you want? Either failure is defeat in the battle of life.

Two summers ago, Cathy and I took the trip of a lifetime to Great Britain. Just ask us about it and you will regret that as we will go on and on. One of our favorite places was Oxford, England, home

of the famous university. We took a walking tour of the university which began on one of the main streets in the village. We saw this small marker in the street and were informed by the tour guide that that is the site of the death of three men in the sixteenth-century who were burned at the stake.

I studied up on these guys and was intrigued by the last to die in this incident. His name is Thomas Cranmer. He had been the first Archbishop of Canterbury and responsible for the Anglican Book of Common Prayers. Cranmer, Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley were sentenced to death by burning for their commitment to the Bible and the historic faith. The story of the death of Latimer and Nicholas was horrible as they were burned together in the street of Oxford. The wood was not placed correctly so Latimer's death was slow and torturous. Cranmer was forced to witness these executions for their faith and he succumbed to the pressure and recanted his faith. God worked in his heart and on the day of his execution, he was told to publically recant to the people of the city.

In 1556, Cranmer spoke in Oxford and denied his recantation. He said:

And now I come to the great thing which so much troubleth my conscience, more than any thing that ever I did or did in my whole life, and that is the setting abroad of a writing contrary to the truth, which now here I renounce and refuse as things written with my hand contrary to the truth which I thought in my heart, and written for fear of death.

When he was tied to the stake and the fire was started, he put his right hand into the flame to let it burn first as an act of contrition for denying the faith.

Now, probably we will not face the flames for the faith. But, we are in a war. We are charged to hold the faith with a good conscience. Consider some occasions where we may shirk back and deny the faith or deny our consciences:

- When we suffer with physical pain the evil one tries to get us to deny the faith
- When we suffer with relational pain: marriages, parents, kids, friends, spiritual leaders etc.—we may be tempted to deny the faith
- When we are in tough times financially, or in morally compromising situations, we may be tempted deny our faith as we sear our consciences.

Bottom line is this: we are in a battle. It is a battle to the death. We have been given a charge similar to Timothy. We must keep the faith and we must keep a good conscience.

War reality #2: There are Consequences to not Heeding the Charge (1:19b-20)

The charge is sobering and challenging, but this next section can be terrifying. The battle is serious. It is not a game and there are casualties. It is somewhat like a football game. Before the game the coach gives the pep talk. We are going to war on the field and we need to do these following things. After the game the tally is taken and the fallout is counted. How did we do?, what was the fallout?, who is hurt?, etc.

Shipwreck

Paul mentions the result of rejecting the faith and the term he uses is “shipwreck.” If he lived at another time he might say train wreck or plane wreck. The point is a disaster. Does that mean these people lose their salvation? I honestly do not think Paul was thinking of that question. I think he was just using a word to describe the fact that when one claims to be in the faith and jumps out: it is a shipwreck of faith.

The ESV translation (and others) also say shipwreck of “their” faith. I do not understand that translation since the word in Greek is “the” which can be translated “their” sometimes but only if there is contextual warrant. The NET Bible uses “the” and I prefer that translation. The point is not that any one person can destroy the Christian faith, but it is true, that those who claim Christ and then dishonor him and speak lies and do sear their consciences can hinder the cause of the faith and do it harm. It could not get much worse than to be one who does harm to the faith that has as it objects our Savior, Jesus Christ.

When I think of shipwreck I think of the Titanic of relatively recent years. Nate gave us the full scoop on that so I looked elsewhere for an example of shipwrecks. I found (on Google, of course) that off the east coast of the U.S. there were many ships which were wrecked in WWII as a result of Nazi subs that sunk them. I researched one called the Empire Gem. It left port in Texas and was headed to England while stopping first in Canada. As they went up the coast, a German sub was actually going after another ship, but since the Empire Gem came into their radar, the Nazis torpedoed and sunk that boat. It carried over 10,000 tons of gasoline so it was a huge burning inferno. Of the 57 crew members only 2 survived.

I asked what lessons can be learned from that horrible incident in the last century in the U.S. and 2,000 years ago in the lives of Hymenaeus and Alexander. I am not sure in either case what caused the disaster, but I would imagine some of the circumstances may be as follows:

- They did not think the danger was very severe - the threat was not serious
- They did not think it would happen to them
- They did not take proper precautions to prevent the disaster
- They did not see it as a life and death issue - it was just another day in a normal life

With a church of our size I have to believe that there are some who are on a course to shipwreck the faith. Some this morning are suspicious of whether the God described earlier in I Timothy is real and real to them. Some have become masters at searing their conscience. We need this warning because the result can easily be to become shipwreck and wonder how that happened.

Handed over to Satan

The two men who shipwrecked the faith were also “handed over to Satan.” No matter how you interpret, this it is not good. I think Paul is referring to the domain of Satan. Paul did a form of

church discipline and removed them from the protection of the church and left them to themselves to bear the brunt of the evil of a Satanic world. While that sounds horrific, and it is, there is grace in the act. They were given an opportunity to learn—namely to learn not to blaspheme. Blaspheme is to smear the name of God. It does not need to be four-letter words. It is to live as if God is not important and thereby to take his name in vain. To live as if he is irrelevant—that is blaspheme. The hope of Paul's act is that these men will be given to the domain of Satan and realize that they need Jesus and will repent of their sin and glorify God rather than deny the faith.

Conclusion

I would like to close with two illustrations and some “take-aways”. I have been praying that this morning some in our congregation would hear this passage and be convicted of their seared consciences and the fact that their life is tracking toward shipwreck and would fly to Jesus. Maybe that is you.

After graduating from college I went to teach in a Christian school in Long Island, NY. It was a great experience as I was young and naïve and thought we could take New York for Christ. I had a close friend who shared my dreams in that time. After 3 years, I left the island and went to seminary. I actually served again with him for one year in Michigan. He was a true champion of the faith and life certainly was not easy for him. I had lost track of him until about 15 years ago I heard from his wife that he had left her and ministry and was living in sin. I was shocked and saddened and saw the reality of shipwreck that is more than theoretical. My prayer is that God will restore him.

The other illustration is a man that I never met. Some of you have heard of Gordon MacDonald. He wrote several books that I have really enjoyed. He publically confessed to the sin of adultery and was resigned from his leadership position at InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. I read of the situation and was saddened to see the effects of sin, but rejoiced in the glory of restitution. He is now involved in editing, writing and Christian leadership on several fronts. God can restore, but the scars will last until death.

So, what? Let me suggest a few parting comments for the people of College Park Church:

1. The Christian life is a war—it is a war for your heart. The war will be battled in your home with your close relationships. The war will be waged in your workplace, in your school, in your locations of recreation, even in the church. The war is challenging the reality that Jesus is enough.
2. We must prepare for battle—get strong in the faith. Learn all you can about theology and God's Word and prayer. Resolve issues of your conscience. Have a clean conscience. If you are reading, looking or meditating on evil—repent and fill your mind with faith in Jesus.
3. The stakes are the highest—life and death. Do not think this is a game. Your soul is in the balance as well as the souls of others. Christ's reputation is in the balance
4. Do not give up even, if you have failed. God is gracious and came for sinners. Repent and cling to faith and a good conscience. Seek help if needed.

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.

© College Park Church

Permissions: You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce this material in any format provided that you do not alter the content in any way and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: by Joe Bartemus. © College Park Church - Indianapolis, Indiana. www.yourchurch.com

Scriptural Citations: Unless otherwise noted, all Biblical quotations are from the English Standard Version.