

## 1 Timothy 1:18-20

### INTRODUCTION

After having a little diversion to speak about the true nature of the law and to speak about the glorious gospel of the Lord Jesus, Paul now comes back to the central issue of this opening chapter. He is concerned, as we have seen about the false doctrines that are being proclaimed in the church at Ephesus. So his words to Timothy in these verses are words of encouragement. He is encouraging Timothy to fight the good fight. Not fight a good fight as you would instruct a boxer, but to fight the good fight.

This fight is worth fighting for, that is the point. What is this fight that Timothy is being urged to fight? It is to hold on to the faith and to do so with a good or clear conscience (v 19).

### 1. HOW PAUL ENCOURAGES TIMOTHY TO FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT (v 18)

i) He encourages Timothy by first of all reminding him of his duty. It is his duty to contend for the faith and to hold on to the faith. This duty is not clear from our English translation but let me try to help you see this point. The word translated 'give' is a word meaning to 'entrust.' It carries with it the idea of receiving this trust from someone with the intention of passing it on to others. It's the idea that is expressed in 2 Timothy 2:2, only in that passage the context is that of passing on truth to others. Here Paul is entrusting Timothy to fight the good fight of the faith and to pass this faith on to others to do likewise. The second word that I want to bring to your attention is the word translated 'instruction.' It is the same word that is translated 'command' in 1:3. This is a command to fight the good fight and therefore failure to do it, is a failure to obey a command. The word is a military term, and commands in the army are expected to be obeyed; in fact they must be obeyed.

Failure to obey commands in the army may endanger someone's life. It is the duty of soldiers to obey their commanding officer.

So by using these terms Paul is making a similar point. It is Timothy's duty to fight the good fight of the faith. He has been entrusted with the task of defending and maintaining the gospel. It is Timothy's duty to see that others are instructed in the gospel so that they too can fight the good fight and hold on to the faith. This duty is underlined by the use of the word 'command.' If Timothy fails to obey this command he is failing in his duty.

Not only that but he is endangering other people's spiritual well being, for if the pure gospel is not maintained and if the true faith is not held on to then people will be led astray into false doctrine and false behaviour. In doing so they are in great danger of missing out on God's glorious salvation.

For us the word duty carries with it far too many negative connotations. Christians don't like to think about their Christian lives as a duty, they love to think about freedom in Christ but not duty. This is one reason why I believe that the church of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in Britain is rife with uncommitted people. Christians don't see it as their duty to be committed any more. We don't mind belonging to the church; but to be committed is something very different.

Certainly to think about it as a duty or a command is not in many people's thinking. Yes committed to my company or job, to my family and even to my charity work but committed to the church is a different thing. We see the church like a club, committed to it as long as it suits us, and if it doesn't then we have no sense of duty towards it.

Of course we need to have a desire to be at church today, or to turn up to pray, or to be involved in other areas of the ministry of the church. But what happens when we do not have that desire

one day. Do you always feel like coming to church? Well unless we have a sense of our duty as Christians then I'm afraid we will be missing when we should be present from the various activities of the church.

You don't always have a desire to go to work, but you have a duty, and that sense of duty will take you there no matter how you feel. Having a sense of duty is not an unspiritual thing; it is as we see a very biblical thing. If we don't have a sense of duty to evangelise then it is unlikely we ever will do so.

But if Timothy or Paul had of adopted the attitude that is adopted by so many Christians today, then Timothy would have no sense of duty to maintain gospel truth or to make the effort of fighting the good fight. If the early church had of adopted that attitude then the gospel would have been lost to us. We all have a duty to maintain the purity of the gospel, and to see to it that we teach and train others to maintain the gospel. In doing so we will be helping to fight the good fight.

The gospel is being watered down all the time in our society, and we must fight to keep it pure. One way it is being eroded is through the ecumenical movement. I cannot believe that true Christians have been so gullible concerning this movement.

Many Christian churches have been drawn into it, and you cannot be involved with this movement without compromising the gospel in some way. You cannot have Catholics and evangelicals worshipping together. You cannot have evangelicals worshipping with Liberals of the Protestant denominations. The argument goes that we have more in common than we have uncommon. Have we?

Is the gospel of the Catholic Church and the liberal church the same gospel of God's grace and mercy that Paul describes to us here? Of course not and yet evangelicals have toyed with such a movement, which comes from the pit of hell itself. It is our duty to stand up against it and to speak out against it. There are far too many Christians who oppose this movement but are afraid to say so. It is our duty to do so.

We have been entrusted with the gospel in all of its purity, if we allow that gospel to become tainted by false teachings then we will be passing on a gospel that is not pure and therefore a gospel that is no gospel at all. So Timothy is encouraged to see it as his duty to fight the good fight.

**ii) He is also encouraged to think of his call into Christian ministry.** This is what Paul is referring to in verse 18. If we turn to 4:14, this is expanded on just a little. In the period when the New Testament was still being written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Prophets and Apostles existed side by side. At some period in the past when Timothy was being set aside for ministry, one of these prophets must have been given a prophecy from God concerning Timothy.

The Elders of the church confirmed it and set young Timothy aside for ministry. What Paul is doing here is taking Timothy back to what we call today his call to the ministry. He is reminding him about that moment, when he was given his orders to be a servant of the living God. I don't know what happened on that occasion but I suggest to you that his duties to the living God would have been spelt out clearly to him. Those duties would include holding to the faith with a good conscience, and fighting the good fight.

He is to follow his instructions given to him at that time and in doing so he will be fighting the good fight. I have heard people in full time Christian work say things like; all that keep me here is the call I received from God. Obviously in today's age that call doesn't come through prophets for the office of prophet, as we know it in the bible, died out along with the office of apostle when the canon of Scripture was completed.

But God's call will keep us holding on to the faith with a clear conscience, when the temptation is very great to compromise with false doctrine. Even for those who do not have a clear call to 'full time ministry' we were all called to ministry when we were called to salvation in Christ.

So Paul encourages Timothy to remember his Christian duty and remember his call. In doing so he will be able to hold on to the faith. We need to focus on our Christian duty and upon our call to salvation and remember that the gospel has been entrusted to us, we are to pass it on in all its purity to others, we are to hold on to the faith, that body of truth we were taught and we are to do so with a good conscience. A good conscience will see to it that we maintain the truth of the gospel, for we cannot give ourselves to falsehood without our consciences being bothered. However if we have gone against our conscience so many times, then it will become distorted, and when that happens our conscience will not be good. The consequences of that is unthinkable, but it certainly could lead to entertaining false doctrine and a diluting of the glorious gospel which saved us and called us to Christ.

But if we keep our conscience clear and by that I mean sensitive to wrong beliefs and practice then that in turn will keep us holding on to the true faith.

But not everyone in Ephesus held on to the faith, or fought the good fight against falsehood.

## 2. THE CONSEQUENCES OF FAILING TO FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT (v 19)

Paul mentions two people who failed to hold on to the faith with a good conscience. We know little about these two characters. It is probable that Hymenaeus is the same man who in 2 Timothy 2:17-18 claims that the resurrection has already taken place. Whether this Alexander is the same man who did Paul a great deal of harm (2 Timothy 4:14) is unknown but I think unlikely. Anyway the point is, these two men once held on to the faith but have now rejected it.

The word 'rejected' means something that was deliberate; they have decided now to reject the gospel for some other gospel, which is no gospel at all. As a result they have shipwrecked their faith. Their spiritual lives are in tatters. Do you see where false doctrine when it is given the time of day in our thinking leads to?

If we constantly go against our good conscience so that we ignore it when its alarm bell starts ringing, then eventually it will stop ringing and before long we will not only have entertained false doctrines but will be advocating them as well. That's what happened to Hymenaeus and Alexander.

So we all need to beware. This holding to the truth, this paying attention to our good consciences is not something we can be indifferent about. We are in danger of shipwrecking our faith and as a consequence, shipwrecking the faith. How do we deal with people with shipwrecked faith? Well that brings me to my final point.

## 3. HOW DID PAUL DEAL WITH THESE TWO MEN (v 20?)

Notice what Paul did. He 'handed them over to Satan.' What does that little phrase mean? To discover this we need to turn to 1 Corinthians 5:5 where the term is also used. In the context of 1 Corinthians, it seems that what it meant is excommunication from the church (v 13). It seems that is exactly what Paul means here in Timothy as well. The church is where God dwells; to remove people from the church is to remove them from the presence of God and to place them in the realm of the world where Satan is described as in control (1 John 5:19). In other words Paul exercises church discipline, and removes them from the influence of the church.

In the church today, certainly in Britain, there is very little church discipline exercised. It seems that Christians can almost believe anything, or do anything without being disciplined by the church. But church discipline is central to maintaining the purity of the gospel. Not only that but it is essential for the repentance of the individual people concerned.

Notice the reason why Paul exercised church discipline. It was "to teach them not to blaspheme." It had a remedial purpose. Paul did it so that these two characters would know that what they were teaching was wrong and must be repented of. Of course excommunication is not the first form of discipline as Matthew 18:15-20 clearly points out. But it is the final act of discipline, it is the last resort, but it must be done for the good of the church but just as importantly for the good of the individual.

The implication is that if any of these individuals realised their sin and repented, then they were to be restored to full fellowship of the church.

The church is weak on this today. We are more concerned about what people will say than what God says. But church discipline is important, people cannot believe what they like nor can they live, as they like, for the gospel is at stake and people's spiritual condition is at stake. Therefore as I conclude, we must be prepared to exercise church discipline in our own church should the need arise. We must not be afraid of what the world will think, if we excommunicate someone from our fellowship.

We simply must be concerned for the sinning individual, and for the purity of the gospel. In our society there is very little discipline anywhere, let that not be the case in the church of Jesus Christ.

So let's learn the lessons for today. Let's see it as our duty to fight the good fight. Let's be determined to maintain the purity of the gospel. For we know the consequences of failing to do so, a shipwrecked faith.

Finally by God's grace let's be prepared to discipline any who fail to hold on to the faith with a good conscience, so that they may be taught not to blaspheme.

Amen