



the good fight

A STUDY OF 1 TIMOTHY

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AN INTRODUCTION

Some things are worth fighting for. We live in a day when biblical ideas are described as archaic and outdated, or maybe even bigoted. But the truth is that the Bible has always been out of step with ideas promoted in the cities where Christians lived. In fact, Jesus himself was often at odds with the influencers and ideologues in his day, so it makes sense that his followers would find themselves on similar turf.

In 1 Timothy, Paul is writing a letter of encouragement to a young pastor of a church in a growing, multicultural city. Paul's letter is a battle field pep talk for Christians seeking to live out their faith. It's full of strong language — command, strive, guard, fight, warfare, strength, entrust, train. Paul regularly speaks of *the truth*, *the faith*, *the good doctrine*, and *the gospel* as a solid and trustworthy body of knowledge that has been passed down containing the life-changing essential beliefs of Christians. He explains that the church was given pastors and leaders to guard the truth and to protect the lives of people in the church. Paul offers direction for how the church is supposed to function in order to help the way of Jesus advance in any generation.

The heart of his letter is clearly stated: "The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" (1 Timothy 1:5).

This is the good fight we are all called to enter.

THOUGHT QUESTION

1 Timothy says that we are to "fight the good fight" and "wage the good warfare," but it also says that the "aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." Do these two ideas seem contradictory to you? Why or why not?

IMPORTANT TOPICS IN 1 TIMOTHY

1 Timothy, along with 2 Timothy and Titus, make up what we call the “Pastoral Epistles.” These three books, or letters, explain what the church is supposed to be and how it is supposed to function. Paul writes, “I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.”¹

In our study of 1 Timothy, we will deal with questions like:

- What is the church?
- What is a church supposed to be doing?
- What is the role of a pastor?
- What is an elder?
- What is a deacon?
- What is the difference between an elder and a deacon?
- What is the role of women in the church?
- How is the church supposed to relate to a lost world?
- What dangers exist for the church?
- Why is doctrine essential for everyday Christians?

The current American Church is almost devoid of ecclesiology, which is the doctrine of the church. In fact, it's become fashionable in Christian circles to bash the church. We have no one to blame but ourselves. Our churches have failed to preach on it, our training programs have failed to teach about it, and our seminaries and institutions have failed to raise up leaders who have a deep theology of the church. Many church leaders have swapped ecclesiological depth for business strategies of entrepreneurs and marketers. As a result, most Christians have little to no understanding of what the church is supposed to be and to do, how is to be formed, or why its beliefs are so important.

But as we will see in 1 Timothy, the church is the most authentic place to encounter the gospel of Jesus, to be trained in the truth, to be nurtured to spiritual health. In God's plan, the church is not lame, irrelevant and unhelpful.² Instead, it's a wonderful connection of passion and plans, mystery and management, spiritual fire and structural forms.

If you've given up on church or dismissed its importance, this series will show you how the church can be life-giving for your soul, strengthening for your faith, and pleasing to your Lord.

¹ 1 Timothy 3:14-15

² Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We Love the Church: In Praise of Institutions and Organized Religion*

THOUGHT QUESTION

Have you ever really put much thought into “church” — what it is, what purpose it serves, how it is to be organized, what it means to be a part of the family of God? Have do your experiences in church seem similar or dissimilar to the church described in 1 Timothy?

VERSES TO MEMORIZE

“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.”

- 1 Timothy 2:5-6

“Train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.”

- 1 Timothy 4:7-8

BACKGROUND FOR 1 TIMOTHY

PURPOSE

The Apostle Paul is a significant figure in the early church. He experienced a remarkable conversion from chief *persecutor* of Christians to the chief *leader* of Christians. In the Bible, Acts 8-9 tell his story of transformation. Paul, at one time, aggressively worked as a Jewish persecutor of Christians, but then he met Jesus and became the forefront spokesperson for the Christian faith. Paul authored 13 of the books in our New Testament. Of those 13 letters, only four were personal letters addressed to individuals. 1 Timothy is a warm, personal, heart-felt letter written by Paul to his young understudy as an encouragement in building the church. This letter was likely written about thirty years after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension.

Paul was a busy leader credited with three missionary journeys, which amounted to over ten years on the road covering twenty-thousand miles on foot or on sea. Along the way, he was robbed, beaten, abandoned by friends, betrayed by colleagues, flogged, imprisoned, weathered and worn from travel, and weary from the weight of leadership.³ As he journeyed, Paul helped to plant new churches in cities throughout that part of the world. When he left a city to continue his pioneering work, he typically appointed leaders in those new churches to protect and guide the people who had come to faith in Jesus.

³ Charles Swindoll, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus* in Swindoll's *Living Insights New Testament Commentary Series*, 3.

In about A.D. 63, the apostle Paul was released from his first imprisonment and revisited some of the churches where he had previously worked, including the church in the city of Ephesus. Paul regularly checked in on various churches “strengthening all the disciples” in the way of Jesus.⁴ When he left Ephesus to continue his travels, he left Timothy in charge of this church, which was strategically placed in the Roman Empire.

Paul knew that Timothy had a tough task in front of him. The church clearly had some problems which needed to be addressed; this is obvious in Paul’s tone: “I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”⁵ It seems as though Paul wrote this letter fairly soon after departing, giving Timothy guidance about how to deal with the problems at hand, but also providing direction in identifying and developing leaders for the church.

Paul also wrote a letter to another pastor and friend named Titus giving him similar instructions. Later, Paul was arrested again, most likely connected with the outbreak of violence against Christians upon the orders of the Roman Emperor, Nero. In about A.D. 66, Paul likely wrote his second letter to Timothy from prison while awaiting execution.⁶ At the end of his second letter, Paul wrote, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.”⁷

In both 1 & 2 Timothy, Paul described the Christian life as “the good fight.” We have taken this phrase as the title for our sermon series.

A MODEL FOR OUR MISSION

Rather than being written to a group of people or church, this epistle is a personal letter from the Apostle Paul to his younger friend and co-worker, Timothy. Timothy is a regular on the New Testament leadership scene, often assisting Paul and the mission of Christ.

Timothy apparently came from a family whose beliefs were divided, with a non-believing Greek father and a believing Jewish mother. At a young age, the

⁴ George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles in the New International Greek Testament Commentary Series*, 16-20, 54.

⁵ 1 Timothy 1:3-5

⁶ Knight, 16-20, 54.

⁷ 2 Timothy 4:7-8

women in his life — his mother and grandmother — taught him the Old Testament (the only Bible they had at the time). More than once, Paul points to this foundation as significant for Timothy's spiritual development. We should never overlook the importance of the work we do in teaching our children, whether at home or at church!

Paul speaks of Timothy as his "true child in the faith." Paul multiplied himself as a leader by developing Timothy and positioning him as a leader in the church. This relationship provides a fantastic model for the church, which should be emulated by us all. Through his friendship, encouragement, teaching, care, prayer, mentoring and affirmation, Paul raised up a new leader for Jesus' mission.

This pattern of discipleship becomes normative for the church. Paul later writes to Timothy, "You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and *what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.*"⁸ As a church following the example of Paul and Timothy, we are called to make disciples who make disciples who make disciples of Jesus.

To see how Paul poured into Timothy and how interconnected their mission is, it is helpful to see how often they are mentioned together in the New Testament.

The following chart lists the places where Timothy is referenced in the New Testament.⁹

Timothy in the New Testament	
Acts 16:1-3	2 Corinthians 1:19
Acts 17:14-15	Philippians 1:1
Acts 18:1-5	Philippians 2:19-24
Acts 19:21-22	Colossians 1:1-2
Acts 20:1-5	1 Thessalonians 1:1-2
Romans 16:21	1 Thessalonians 3:1-6
1 Corinthians 4:16-17	2 Thessalonians 1:1
1 Corinthians 16:10-11	Philemon 1:1
2 Corinthians 1:1	Hebrews 13:22-24

⁸ 2 Timothy 2:2, italics mine.

⁹ Swindoll, 8.

AN IMPORTANT REALITY CHECK

Ephesus was a busy port city in the wealthiest province of the Roman Empire. The city was well-known as an attraction for pagan religious worship as well as for philosophical debate. With people, ideas and economic influence all converging in this multicultural center, it was obviously a strategic outpost for the church's mission. But with great opportunity came great challenge.

From a Christian's perspective, false beliefs and wrong-headed ideas were common, and these offered a constant distraction to the church members. Things that had become cultural norms and commonplace behaviors in the city would push against the teachings of Jesus. This would create tension for those who had put their faith in Christ and joined his church.

One stark example of this is the temple worship that had long became a social practice for those in the city. Temple worship was so pervasive that city officials set aside an entire month each year for celebration to honor the goddess Artemis. The temple of Artemis was so impressive that it was considered one of the Seven Wonders of the World. During the month-long holiday, work was stopped so that the city could enjoy sporting events, attend the theater, watch live music, and make offerings to Artemis at the temple.¹⁰ The entire celebration was a huge financial boost to the city with people from all around flooding in to participate.

With an event of such significance to the entire city, it is easy to imagine the pull that such experiences would have on the Christians who lived there. The worship of Artemis had become so enculturated in the city that many people rejected anything which threatened the status quo of the comfortable, financially lucrative life to which they were accustomed. In fact, you can read in Acts 19 about a related conflict that arose between the people of the city and the followers of Jesus, which led to protests, threats, and riots against Christians. This was a real battle ground for this new church. It is no wonder that Paul spent more time in Ephesus than in any other city and felt compelled to leave behind his trusted protégé to protect and nurture the people in the church.

For you and me, it is important for us to recognize that, at least to some extent, we too are products of the city and culture in which we live. We are not immune to the push and pull of our world, and it is common for Christians to be tossed around by wrong-headed thoughts and actions. Part of growing toward maturity is to learn a new way of thinking and of living. The early church was often referred to as "The Way," because they were wholly committed to the way of Jesus. Of course, this didn't happen overnight but required them to learn a new way of life.

Scripture teaches that when we are saved by Christ, we are called out of the world to be a new community. This community is the church. The Bible speaks of us in this way: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him

¹⁰ Swindoll, 9.

who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”¹¹

When we are made alive in Christ, things change—we become different from what we once were. Inevitably, the very nature of being set apart from the city where we live is going to create tension, both *internally* in our hearts and *externally* with some of our friends and neighbors. This means that we should expect to find ourselves in conflict with some of the thoughts and morals and beliefs of our world.

For these reasons, we need the reality check given by a call to wage the good warfare, and we need these complementary reminders, which occur near the beginning and end of Paul’s letter:

- “The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”¹²
- “O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.”¹³

THOUGHT QUESTION

Our city is neither home to one of the Seven Wonders of the World nor filled with worship of a goddess, but our world has other ideas and attractions that pull our minds and hearts away from Jesus. If you were to list 2-3 things at the top of the list, what are they?

CHRIST AT THE CENTER

Paul reminds Timothy that Jesus is at the center of our lives and the center of our church: “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.”¹⁴ Throughout his letter, Paul keeps Christ at the forefront of his thought. He repeatedly warns Timothy (and us) not to listen to any different doctrine, myths, speculations, assertions that would lead them away from the truth. Grace, mercy and peace come through Christ, the only one

¹¹ 1 Peter 2:9-10

¹² 1 Timothy 1:3

¹³ 1 Timothy 6:11-12

¹⁴ 1 Timothy 2:5-6

who can make a way for us to unite with God our Father. Paul writes: “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”¹⁵ This is our salvation, our hope, our motivation, our confession, and our strength. Everything depends on Jesus.

KEY PHRASES IN 1 TIMOTHY

- true child in the faith
- in accordance with the gospel of glory with which I have been entrusted
- I thank him who has given me strength
- the grace of our Lord overflowed for me
- Christ Jesus came to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost
- this charge, I entrust to you
- wage the good warfare
- the household of God
- the church of the Living God
- a pillar and buttress of the truth
- being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed
- to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people
- command and teach these things
- practice these things, immerse yourself in them so that all may see your progress
- keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching
- teach and urge these things
- fight the good fight of the faith
- guard the deposit entrusted to you

THOUGHT QUESTION

What are you most looking forward to in this study? What questions do you hope to answer? What concerns or doubts do you have about church? What hopes do you have for the church?

¹⁵ 1 Timothy 1:15

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

Devotional Commentary (accessible to all)

Charles Swindoll, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus* in *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary*

Intermediate Commentaries (accessible to all, but more difficult)

John Calvin, *1 & 2 Timothy & Titus* in the *Crossway Classic Commentaries*

R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus* in *Preaching the Word Commentary*

Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles* in the *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*

John MacArthur, *1 Timothy* in *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*

Scholarly Commentaries (academic discussion including languages)

George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles* in the *New International Greek Testament Commentary*

William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* in the *Word Biblical Commentary*

Phillip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* in the *New International Commentary on the New Testament*

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