Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Fighting the Noble War, Part 2
Scripture: 1 Timothy 1:18-19
Code: 54-8

Let's open our Bibles this morning for our study of God's Word again to 1 Timothy chapter 1. First Timothy chapter 1. I want to return to verses 18 to 20, and though this is a very brief passage, it seems as though the Spirit of God has filled my heart with all kinds of things to say relative to the passage, and so we began last week, we'll continue this week, and finish next week on just these three brief verses. But they are rich and they direct our thoughts to things most needful.

In 1 Timothy chapter 1, I want to read those verses for you beginning at verse 18. "This command I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which pointed to thee that thou by them might fight a good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience which some having put away have made shipwreck of the faith of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander whom I have delivered unto Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme."

Now, the key phrase that we noted last Lord's day is at the end of verse 18, "fight a good warfare" or "fight a noble warfare." And we reminded you last time that Paul is calling Timothy to the awareness that he is engaged in a war, and in so calling Timothy to that sensitivity, he calls the rest of us as well. We are to understand that our calling is to fight a noble war against the forces of Satan. In the first chapter, then, he speaks of this war and in the last chapter of this epistle, chapter 6 verse 12, he says, "Fight the good fight of faith." So beginning the epistle and ending the epistle, he reminds Timothy that he is indeed in a war against the forces of Satan.

Now, last Lord's day as we began to examine just that phrase, we looked at something of the nature of this warfare. We saw that we are engaged as an extension of a battle between God and Satan. Satan having rebelled against God, set about to make war on God to attain his own selfish ends; he fell, not alone, drawing a third of the angels with him. He now has a host of demons who, along with him, fight against God and the holy angels and men also, by virtue of whether they receive Christ or reject Him, take sides in the battle as well. So there is a raging cosmic conflict between Satan and God which involves demons and angels and redeemed men and unredeemed men.

Now, the sum of all of that for us is that like Timothy and like Paul and like all other believers, we are engaged in an intimate personal conflict with the supernatural enemy of God, and the sooner we understand that, the sooner we can prioritize our lives. We wrestle not against flesh and blood, not a human enemy, but principalities and powers and the rulers of the darkness of this world and spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies. All those are terms describing demons. We are engaged with a

supernatural enemy.

No one understood that better than the apostle Paul who wrote this to Timothy, who wrote what I just quoted from Ephesians 6:12. No one understood it better than he did who, in his own testimony, says in 2 Corinthians 12:7 that “there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me.” Whatever that specifically might have been, he saw as a messenger of Satan to come against him, and so he realized the intimacy of that attack. In 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, he also writes in verses 17 and 18: “But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time, in presence not in heart, endeavored to more abundantly to see your face with great desire, wherefore we would have come unto you, even I, Paul, once and again, but Satan hindered us.”

Now, Paul knew about this intimate warfare, and he calls Timothy here in 1 Timothy chapter 1 to the same conflict, to be aware that he is engaged in a serious spiritual battle. In fact, he calls Timothy to fight on the front lines. In effect, Timothy’s task, as outlined in chapter 1, is to confront the false pastors, false elders, false leaders, false teachers in the church at Ephesus and surrounding areas, no doubt, confronting both their doctrine and their ungodly practice. That’s not an easy task. Paul knew it wasn’t an easy task, and even though he had given Timothy instruction as to that task when he was with Timothy in Ephesus, he now writes him a letter reinforcing that because he knows it is a difficult task. And he calls Timothy in these three verses by way of a summary to fulfill that task as if he were a front-line soldier called to a very hot part of the battle to do something very essential for the matter of victory for the whole army. So these three verses sum up Timothy’s responsibility and accountability to this matter of fighting a noble warfare.

Now, I want to add that Timothy was mature enough to handle this. He was a product of the personal discipling ministry of the apostle Paul. He had traveled with Paul, he knew Paul, he had pastored alongside Paul. He had been out there on the front lines as an evangelist and still was called to do the work of an evangelist. He knew what it was to confront an ungodly society. He was strong in doctrine. He was nourished up in the words of good doctrine. He was well trained, well taught, well prepared, so much so that in terms defined in 1 John 2:13-14, he would have been at least a spiritual young man who had overcome the wicked one by his knowledge of the Word of God. So he would not be a victim of false teaching. He would not be a victim of heresy or error. He was strong enough, mature enough to know the satanic lie, the satanic deception, to nail it, to aim at it, to hit the target, and to be of use to God in dealing with it. So he is the man that God calls through the expression of the will of the Holy Spirit through Paul to this particular part of the battle.

Now, Timothy, as I said, does not have an easy task because in the church at Ephesus, there has come an encroaching group of leaders who are the agents of Satan, and they are sowing false doctrine everywhere, and they are not only advocating error but they are advocating evil. They may not be overtly advocating evil, but that’s the way it comes out. They are advocating an untrue doctrine and an ungodly lifestyle, and so Timothy is called to deal with this, and it’s a difficult thing. He’s not

dealing with someone down the line, in terms of spiritual responsibility, but with leaders.

Now, just to remind you of what the issues were, let me remind you of basically two things. They were attacking the truth; that is, they were attacking sound doctrine, and they were attacking godliness. Notice, for example, in chapter 2, it seems as though they were even attacking the person of Christ by what Paul says to Timothy in verse 5 of chapter 2. “There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all to be testified in due time. For this I am ordained a preacher and an apostle, I speak the truth in Christ and lie not, a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity.”

Now, apparently, from that we can ascertain that there was some kind of an attack on the mediatorship of Christ, some kind of attack on the sufficiency of Christ, some kind of attack on the work of Jesus Christ. We find it again indicated in chapter 3 verse 16. He says it is without controversy that the mystery of godliness is a great mystery. It is unarguable that the mystery of God in human flesh, which is what he means, the mystery of God coming in human flesh is a profound mystery, it is a great mystery, and this is that mystery. God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the nations, believed on in the world, and received up into glory, and there he sort of chronicles the life and work of Christ and again seems to be saying, “Look, this is difficult but this is the truth, the incarnation of God in Christ.”

And then we find also in chapter 6 and verse 13 – verse 14, rather, he speaks about the Lord Jesus Christ at the end of verse 14. Then in verse 15 he says, “Which in His times He shall show” and then describes Christ as the blessed and only potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, “who only has immortality” – that makes Him God – “dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man has seen nor can see, to whom be honor and power and everlasting. Amen.” In other words, affirming and asserting the deity of Jesus Christ. So apparently, the deity of Christ was under attack, the person of Christ was under attack, the incarnation of God in Christ was under attack, the sufficiency of Christ as the mediator was under attack. An attack on Christ.

Furthermore, it was not only an attack on Christ but an attack also on the saving gospel of Christ. Back in chapter 1, instead of the gospel, instead of true doctrine, in verse 4 it says these false teachers were teaching fables or Jewish myths, endless genealogies, which don’t do anything but serve to raise questions rather than answers, they bring no godly edification at all, they’re not according to the true faith. Verse 5, they don’t have a good conscience and unfeigned faith. They are a turning aside, they are a swerving. He further says they not only pervert the gospel but they pervert the law. Verse 7, they think themselves to be teachers of the law; the truth is they have no idea what they’re saying or what they’re affirming so dogmatically. So they were attacking the saving gospel of Christ.

Verse 15 of chapter 1, this is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance – as if some were not accepting it – that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. They may have been advocating some salvation only for the legalistic elite, salvation only for those who can keep a certain standard, and so again we see them attacking the gospel.

Further that, verse 17, “The King eternal and immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory forever and ever,” is again an affirmation of the true God. All of these things speak about an attack against sound doctrine, and we find in chapter 2 that it is good and acceptable in verse 3, in the sight of God our Savior who will have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Perhaps they were denying the sufficiency of salvation for all men. Perhaps they were denying the availability of salvation for all men. Then in chapter 4 verse 1, it says they were teaching doctrines of demons that came from seducing spirits and causing some to depart from the true faith, the faith that alone saves. Verse 2, they were speaking lies in hypocrisy.

And so Timothy is enjoined repeatedly in this epistle to preach sound teaching as over against the unsound teaching. So here were these men who had risen to the heights of leadership and they were teaching lies, teaching lies about Christ, teaching lies about His saving gospel, and they were in a place of authority with all the right credentials.

I don’t know if you looked at the Los Angeles Times this last week. One day there was an article on the front page in the left-hand lead column, an article chronicling a meeting together of supposedly all the New Testament scholars, and they were going to vote on whether what Jesus said was really true. They were going to vote on that as if that’s something that you are supposed to vote on. What is so sad about that is that these are all people who have masqueraded as teachers of the New Testament and who know not what they teach nor the God of whom they speak. But they have no right in the world to vote on the veracity of the words of Jesus Christ. To even assert that such is necessary is to attack the credibility of the Word of God and the Christ of God, and that is in exact terms what their intent is.

They are attacking the truth of Christ and the truth of the saving gospel. It is consistent with false teachers, false elders, false pastors, false prophets and apostates that they attack the person, the work, and the preaching and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. They will do that because they are energized by Satan, and Satan’s attack is against God and His Christ, and so it comes in the mouth of false teachers. They are not just well-meaning souls who have slipped a little in their understanding; they are agents of Satan.

Now, the second thing that we see in 1 Timothy is not only an attack on the truth about Christ and His work but an attack on the virtue of life; that is, godly living and biblical morality. Back in chapter 1 verse 5, it says that they are not those who experience love and a pure heart and a good conscience and faith unfeigned. They don’t have any integrity of character. They’re not pure. Their consciences

are not clear, and a clear conscience is the result of a pure life, a pure heart. But they've turned aside from those things, and they may well be being described in verses 9 and 10 as lawless, disobedient, ungodly sinners, unholy profaned murderers of fathers and mothers, man slayers, fornicators, homosexuals, kidnappers, liars, perjurers, and so forth.

Their morality matched their doctrine. It was as in error as was their theology. They, like those of whom we read in verse 19, had shipwrecked the faith. They, in verse 20, had blasphemed – that is to speak evil of the true God. In chapter 2, we find from verses 8 to 10 that women had substituted outward adornment for inward godliness, and verse 10 says they would rather provide godliness with good works than outward array.

We find also in chapter 4 that Paul reminds Timothy that he is to be a good minister and he is to nourish up in the words of faith and good doctrine to which he's attained and then refuse their profane and old wives' fables, and then this: and to exercise yourself rather unto godliness for bodily exercise profits little but godliness is profitable unto all things. They're preoccupations with the external and the outward and the physical, and he says you better put yourself in line to exercise that which leads to godliness. Now remember, I told you that "godliness" is a key word in the pastoral epistles.

Chapter 5, we find the same thing in verse 11. There were younger widows who were wanton against Christ. Verse 12, they threw away their first faith. Verse 13, they were idle, they were going around from house to house instead of staying in their own homes and doing what they were called as women of God to do. They were tattlers – or tale bearers – busybodies, speaking things they shouldn't. And verse 15, some already turned aside after Satan, and that has to do with their behavior. And even some of the leaders, of course, were leading in this and that's why they needed to be disciplined as he goes on to speak of that in chapter 5.

Chapter 6 verse 1 speaks of the name of God not being blasphemed nor His doctrine being blasphemed, which indicates that there was some blasphemous things going on. There were all kinds of arguments – verse 4 – disputes, envy, strife, railing, evil suspicions, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds destitute of the truth, supposing that money is godliness. But godliness with contentment is great gain. In other words, they had perverted doctrine and purity of life. That's the point, and that's where the attack was coming. So you have two things, error and evil – error and evil – and Timothy is called to confront this at high places.

In fact, if you look at chapter 3, the first 15 verses deal with the qualifications for a leader. Those are not put in a vacuum, they're not just dropped in here without any relation to context, they're here because they're put in as a contrast – they're put in as a contrast. There were all kinds of people – verse 1 – desiring the office of overseer. There were many people who wanted to be in spiritual leadership. It says here they desire they office of an overseer. In chapter 1, it said they desired to be teachers of the law. They wanted to be teachers and leaders. But he says you can't put them there

unless they have these qualifications, and I believe they're contrastive. They must be blameless rather than sinful and vile like the ones that you have. They must be one-woman men rather than the men who are preoccupied with multiple women. They must be temperate and sober-minded and good behavior as opposed to those who are not that are in leadership. See, all of that is contrastive.

In chapter 5 verse 17 and following, he says when you find those that aren't what they ought to be, you need to discipline them publicly before the whole church. So Timothy has a real job. He needs to excise out all these false leaders, get them out of the church, discipline them in the church, call them to an account, call the people to rally around the truth of God's revelation and godly living, and that's not an easy task. So he's on the front line, right on the front line, and I believe it's a little – very little different from what we have today. And in our own church, we may not be experiencing all of these kinds of things, but in the Christianity around us, indeed we are, and we're equally on the cutting edge as Satan tries to destroy our faith in Christ's person, try to destroy our confidence in Christ's work, try to twist the true saving gospel, lead people to tolerate evil and sin and any kind of lifestyle in the name of Christianity and destroy the real work of God.

Now, in the midst of this fiery conflict, what is it that Timothy has to understand? Well, he has to understand his responsibility and his accountability to three sources: the church, the Lord, and then to the blasphemers or enemies themselves. We'll get into the third one next week. I want you to look at the first two this morning.

First of all, and for Timothy and us as well, we learn the same lesson here. In order to win, in order to fight the noble fight the way it ought to be fought, we have to first understand our responsibility and accountability to the church, and that's what he says to Timothy off the beginning of verse 18. "This command I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which pointed to you that by them you might fight a noble warfare." So the first thing is Timothy's responsibility and accountability to the church.

And let me show you what I mean by that. Paul says this: "I command you, you have been entrusted, and prophecies have confirmed that you're to fight this noble war." Now, all of those refer to the church. Paul, as an apostle in the church, commands Timothy to carry out a commission given to him by that same apostle and confirmed by those who had the gift of prophecy in the church. He has a responsibility to those within the church who were led by the Spirit of God to call him into the ministry to fulfill that ministry.

First of all, let's look at the command. The word "charge" in the Authorized is "command." It refers to a military command – a military command. It's used in chapter 1 in that way, it's used here that way. It is a military command. It is not something that is discussed; it is something that is given as an order to be carried out. Timothy is under military obligation, and this is not new. Would you look at chapter – I should say this is not isolated. This is not isolated. Chapter 5 verse 21, Paul says, using a different

Greek term but the same meaning – 5:21 – “I command you” – speaking to Timothy – “before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things.” Now, that’s pretty strong stuff. “I command you and I hold you accountable to God and Christ and the holy and elect angels.”

Chapter 6 verse 12, he says fight the good fight and so forth, and then in verse 13, “I command you” – and here he does use the same word as in chapter 1. “I command you in the sight of God who makes all things alive.” Then verse 14, “That you keep this commandment without spot and unrebukable until the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ.” So he is commanding Timothy, like a general would command a colonel, he is commanding him to do this.

I love that because this puts Timothy’s responsibility in the category of duty. Duty. Now, when I say that word, immediately I realize there are many people who don’t understand that. Duty? That’s not a word we like to talk about. We don’t know anything about that today. In Christianity, we know about freedom. We know about spiritual success. We talk about joy and peace. We talk about fulfillment. We talk about sort of satisfaction from the spiritual end. Very indulgent but we know very little about duty – very little about duty – and that’s part of what’s been built into our culture and it’s found its way into the church. We are an undisciplined culture. We are an utterly self-indulgent culture, and so what we have gained in the church is a lot of people whose personal preoccupation is self-indulgence, and whatever makes them feel good and whatever they particularly want to do or don’t want to do governs their life. They know nothing of duty – very little of duty. We are not a duty-bound people in our thinking.

As I was flying home from Cleveland this week after speaking to some pastors back there for a few days, two young men who were pastoring a church in the Baltimore area were on the plane and they said to me, “Could we talk to you?” I said – one fellow said could he speak with me and – one of the two, and I said, “Sure, be happy to, but let me spend a few hours, finish my sermon, and then when – before we get in for a landing, we’ll spend some time talking.” So we got to talking just as we were coming from Las Vegas to Los Angeles in the air, descending, and they were asking lots of – he was asking lots of questions.

Then we began to talk more and more, and finally we were at the gate and we were still kind of talking, and he said to me, “How do you know what the priorities of your life are? I mean you have a college and a radio ministry and tape ministry and you write books and you have the church ministry. How do you know?” And basically, as I begin to think about that, even while I was talking to him and afterwards, my life basically boils down to a very simple thing. I believe God has called me to a certain duty, and I can honestly confess to you that I do not necessarily spend my time doing what I want to do.

In fact, I said to this young man, “I can’t remember the last time I did something that I just wanted to do, just for the sake of wanting to do it. I am duty-bound to do certain things, and those are the things that I believe God has given me. There are other things I might like to do, there are other things that I might wish to do, there are some things I might wish not to do, but I’m bound to do the things I believe God has given me to do.”

And the young man, while we were talking, said, “I think you understand what’s on your plate, don’t you? And what you’re to partake of.” And I said, “Well, I hope I do.” But I’ve tried to narrow my life down to doing the duty that God has given me to do and that’s fine with me. I really am much more fulfilled in having the sense of doing my duty to God than I would be in having the sense of doing what I want all the time. But there’s very little understanding of that in contemporary Christianity. That’s not a popular thing to just do your duty. I mean for some people, it’s a wonder that they can show up even around here, and you have a duty to worship God, be faithful.

I was talking to one pastor recently who said, “When people join our church, they sign a covenant to be here Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night, and if they’re not, we go see them and ask them why because we feel that they have a duty to worship God and to assemble with His redeemed people and to use their spiritual gifts and to participate in prayer and fellowship” and so forth and so on. I would wonder what would happen if we made that a condition of coming to Grace Community Church, you had to come Sunday morning, Sunday night, spend diligent time in prayer and in the study of the Word and share Christ with people. How many people would be duty bound to fulfill that? Or how many people would be instantly in one week disqualified? See, we know little of duty.

One of my kids was telling me this week about somebody who works in – I guess it’s the Search Program here at Grace Church, and that’s the only thing they ever come to. They can’t really get around to making it to anything else. My response to that is if you can’t be at Sunday morning/Sunday night worship and grow along with the church and hear the Word of God spoken, you shouldn’t be serving in the church because you don’t know where we are. You don’t know where we’re going. You can’t reinforce what the Spirit of God is teaching us, and you’re not moving along in your spiritual development and growth in response to what the Word of God is teaching you, and I don’t believe I’m here just because I like to be here, I believe I’m here teaching the Word of God because that’s God’s desire for His people.

I know there are some people who can hardly make it to the service. They come to a class and go to breakfast. Well, I realize that water seeks its own level, and there are some people who are just a little bit shallow in the spiritual dimension, but somewhere along the line, somebody needs to come to grips with duty if they’re going to come to the end of their life and have anything to show for it throughout eternity for the glory of God. It’s a matter of duty.

Look with me at Luke 17 and that's – this is an extension of what Paul is saying – but Luke at Luke 17, a sort of bypassed passage, I'm quite confident. In fact, you may find that apart from reading through the Scripture, you've never thought about this passage or haven't in a long time. But listen to what it says, Luke 17:7: "Which of you having a servant plowing or feeding cattle will say to him when he has come from the field, 'Go and sit down to eat'?" Which of you is going to say to a servant when he comes in, "Oh, sit down and eat"? No. "Will you not rather say to him, 'Get ready that with which I may eat and gird yourself'" – that is, put on proper clothes – "'and serve me till I have eaten and drunk and afterward you can eat and drink'?" I mean that's what a servant is. "You come, you serve me, then you can do it."

"Now, does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not," Jesus says. "So you also when you shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unprofitable servants, we have done that which was our'" – what? – "'our duty.'" Our duty. "Don't give me an honorary degree, don't hail me as a hero, I just did my duty. I mean what ever happened to just doing your duty? Just fulfilling your spiritual disciplines for the glory of God?

Paul knew much of that. Acts 26 he says, "When I was confronted by the Lord Jesus Christ on the Damascus Road" – he's giving his testimony to Agrippa, he says, "O Agrippa, I was not disobedient to that heavenly vision." And that heavenly vision was basically a command from the Lord Jesus Christ. He said, "Paul, basically, I have made you a minister and an apostle to the Gentiles." And he says, "I was not disobedient." Paul knew all about duty. "Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel," 1 Corinthians 9. "I am duty bound. I am under divine obligation to use my gift and fulfill my calling."

You remember back in Exodus chapter 4 when God gave His duty to Moses and Moses started equivocating and backing out and bowing down and saying, "Oh, I can't do that, I can't do this, I can't speak," and so forth and so on, and the Lord was very angry with Moses because he wanted to shirk that which was a divine duty. God gave that duty to Isaiah. God gave that duty to Jeremiah. God gave that duty to Ezekiel. God gave a duty to Jonah. You remember what Jonah did with his duty? Went the other direction and wound up in a disaster because of it.

You see, every preacher and every servant of the Lord is in one way or another duty bound, and I wish we had – I wish we had a society of disciplined people, of people who understood spiritual duty, not just the whims and the will and the wishes of weak-kneed, spineless, contemporary mentality. Every preacher is under command. When Paul said to Timothy in 2 Timothy chapter 4, "I command you" – this is 4:1 – "I command you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom, preach the Word."

I'll tell you, I'd like to give that command to a lot of folks. I meet sometimes people who are in the ministry and they don't preach the Word. They preach this and that and this and the other thing. I was

talking to some folks this week who said that they were in a church where all they ever got was book reviews and contemporary analysis, and if these people were truly called, you want to command them. On the other hand, sometimes I meet young men and they say, “Well, I’ve been called to preach. God’s put His hand on me.” Well, when did you last preach? “Oh, I haven’t started yet.” “Well, man, if you’ve been called to preach, I command you in the name of Jesus Christ, preach.” “Well, where am I going to preach?” “Well, I don’t know, preach. I started in a bus depot. People thought I was crazy. A street corner. Sometimes in the rain. Find a place. Find a place, preach the Word.”

Look at Ezekiel 33, and I’ll show you something I think is sad but true. It reflects on this same thought. You remember what Paul said to Timothy, “Preach the Word; be instant” – what? – “in season, out of season.” That means when it’s welcome and when it’s not welcome, whether they like it or don’t like it, and I want you to see what is really a sad thing. Ezekiel chapter 33 verse 30, “Also, thou son of man, the children of thy people still are talking against thee by the walls and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, ‘Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that comes forth from the Lord.’”

The people are all getting together and saying, “Aw, let’s go down hear that prophet. Boy, that poor guy is down there giving that message from the Lord. Let’s go down and hear him.” They’re really not for him, they’re against him, it says, but they want to go down and hear him, he’s a novelty, “So let’s go hear him. Let’s hear what he has to say.”

And so – verse 31 – “They come unto thee as the people come and they sit before thee as my people.” So you’ve got a mixed multitude. You’ve got the ones who are there and they’re taking in the Word of God and then you’ve got these others, and they sit there and they hear your words but they will not do them. They’re not interested in responding. They won’t do them. “With their mouth they show much love, but their heart goes after their covetousness.” They’re interested in their bank account and their stocks and bonds and houses and cars and land and growth and success and worldly things, and with their mouth, oh, they tell you such nice things, “Wonderful sermon, Pastor, great, oh, we just enjoy it,” but they don’t do what you say. “And you are unto them as a very lovely song, of one that has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument.” I mean it’s very nice. “For they hear your words but they don’t do them.” “They like to hear you,” “Oh, you’re a curiosity, Ezekiel, but they don’t do what you say.”

He preached his whole ministry to people like that but he preached faithfully. Why? Because he was under command. He was under command. Now, back to 1 Timothy. That’s exactly what Paul is saying to him. “I command you.” And on what basis? On the basis of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. “I speak for God. I command you.”

And men don’t listen today. There were some, surely, in the Ephesian church that didn’t listen, and there are many today who won’t listen. Isaiah 6, God said to Isaiah, “They won’t listen. Their eyes will

be blind. Their ears will be deaf. Their hearts will be fat and they won't listen." And it's true. You preach your heart out and you preach your heart out and they don't listen. In fact, preaching today is somewhat depreciated, especially if you just preach the Bible all the time. People accuse me and others who do that of being very narrow-minded. "Poor MacArthur, he has tunnel vision, he's such a one-dimensional person."

I was sitting on the plane and going back there. I always have these plane experiences, I don't know why, but I sit down to study and this guy sits next to me, great big, huge guy. He's eating his lunch and drinking his vodka and having a great time; I'm studying my Bible and writing all this stuff down to tell you here when I get here Sunday. And after we get along – the whole ride is bumping and flopping around and so he may have been thinking about God during the flight, I don't know, but anyway, finally he looks over at me and he says – he saw my Bible and writing, he says, "Nice to know that everything we need to know is in one book, isn't it?" I mean here is an unregenerate pagan who knows what half of Christianity doesn't even know – and most seminary professors. "Nice to know that everything we need to know is in one book," he says, and kind of laughs because that stuff makes you laugh – even when things aren't funny.

And I said, "What makes you say that?" I mean we were off, I mean it was great. Great for me because I got to tell him some things he needed to know. He was a dentist and he had been doing what just normal unsaved people do, they just travel around and have fun, and he'd toured California for a couple of weeks – great time. Here's a guy who doesn't go to church, doesn't know the Lord, and he says that everything you need to know is in this book. "Well, man, if you believe that, that lays a pretty heavy trip on you." Well, we had a good talk about that, and we're going to follow up on that talk.

But, you know, when you go to preach the Word of God, even though there's sort of a – I suppose, an initial acquiescence to Scripture, you start to preach it and people start backing off real fast. Well, we live in a day of media mentality, you know, if you're going to preach, I mean make it interesting. It's hard to compete, you know. I read this week that in the average one hour of television, there are 13.3 violent acts within one hour. Any one hour in primetime television, you'll see 13.3 violent acts. That's tough to compete with. I can't do one violent act when I preach one whole sermon. I can't put scenery, I can't – I mean I've known guys that have tried to fight that.

There's a guy up in northern California and they have stage things. He'll preach on materialism one time and out comes a Corvette with a girl laying on the hood, you know. But I'm not into that, I got to confess. That's not my style. But I mean you – I suppose he made some kind of a point, I don't know what the point was. But preaching does find its way – find it difficult to get its way into the hearts of people because we've been trained to be uninterested unless all kinds of things are blowing up about every five minutes. People have lost the skill of concentration and meditation. They don't think very well, either, when left to themselves.

There's an anti-authority attitude. If you're in authority and you say this is the truth, they immediately react negatively to that because everybody's against authority in a society that says, "I'm in charge." And there's a critic mentality, everything is up for criticism. There's no respect. Then there's a psychological orientation. People want pop psychology out of the pulpit, not the Word of God, and there are a lot of people giving them pop psychology.

But the command to Timothy was very simple. The command is to fight the noble war against the foes identified with Satan, and that's going to be using the Word of God, and that's why all the way through the epistle, he says you've got to nourish up in sound doctrine. So you have a command. In spite of what men say, in spite of what their faces look like, in spite of the fact they come along, shake your hand, say how nice you are, think you sound great, and don't do what you say, you keep doing it, and you call for the duty that God would have you call for.

Second thing. The first one was a command, the second thing in his relationship to the church was a commission. A commission. Look what he says, this second main verb here, "This command I give" – really, the first verb, the first one is a substantive, it's a noun, this command I entrust or commit to you. Now, here he takes another dimension of this and he says not only do you have a command, but you have a commission. "I entrust you with this." The word paratithmi is a word for a deposit you put in a bank, it's a valued deposit. Paul gave to Timothy a valuable deposit. What was it? It was a deposit of truth. It was a deposit of truth, which is more valuable than anything. Second Timothy 2:2, "The things which you have heard from me among many witnesses, the same entrust to faithful men." "I entrusted it to you, you keep it and entrust it to others." He repeatedly told Timothy to keep care of that sacred trust.

Back in chapter 1 verse 11, he says, "The glorious gospel of the blessed God was committed to my trust," and he got it from Jesus. Read Galatians 1. Paul got it from Jesus. Paul then took that trust that he had from Jesus of sound doctrine, that gospel, that biblical truth, and passed it on to Timothy, and he says, "Timothy, hang on to that and don't let it be adulterated and don't let it be varied and don't change it." The end of the epistle, chapter 6 verse 20, "O Timothy, keep that which is committed to your trust." "And don't listen to all of those profane, vain babblings and false science. Keep that thing which was committed to your trust." Second Timothy 1:14 – look at this – verse 13: "Hold the form of sound words." Verse 14: "The good thing committed to thee, keep it by the Holy Spirit." "Don't let go of it."

So Timothy had a command and he had a commission. He had a military command to fulfill his calling and a commission of doctrine with which to fulfill that calling, and we must be true to the historic faith. Watch out for people who have something new. Jesus gave a trust of truth to Paul, and Paul gave a trust to Timothy, and Timothy gave it to faithful men who would give it to others also, and that same deposit of truth has come down to us, and when you hear somebody come along who's got a

theology that no one ever heard of, run the other direction. This is an ancient trust to be preserved. Watch out for those who have new truths. If it sounds like it's new, it can't be true. Check it out.

Thirdly, there is not only a command to obey and a commission to fulfill but there is a confirmation to live up to. He says, "This command I entrust or commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which pointed me to you." Now, this command and this commission, this calling of Timothy was confirmed through prophecies. Now, prophecy, the gift of prophecy, or the New Testament prophet mentioned so often in the book of Acts, the New Testament prophet and the gift of prophecy, you can read about that in 1 Corinthians 12, that gift and that prophet were used by God to speak the will and the Word of God in the early church. The gift itself is a gift of proclamation. I feel I have the gift of prophecy; that is, I speak forth the Word of God. When I use that gift, I don't speak revelation from God, I'm not getting direct revelation, I speak revelation from the Word of God but not from God directly. But when the Word was not written, God gave them direct revelation. God gave them direct words to speak for Him.

Now, the apostles spoke doctrine usually. That's why doctrine was called the apostles' doctrine, Acts 2:42. They spoke primarily doctrine, whereas the prophets would speak the practical issues of the church, and if you go through the book of Acts, you can see the practical ministry of the prophets. For example, in chapter 13, 15, 21, 22, and 26 of Acts, in all those chapters you'll see some work of a prophet practically bringing the Word of God to a given situation in the church. Not so much doctrine as what is needed to express the will of God for the life of that church in a practical way.

Now, these prophets, we don't know who they were, they're plural, the prophecies are plural, we don't know where this happened, but he says the prophecies – and then he uses an interesting verb, it means "leading the way to you." Now, the fact that he says "prophecies leading the way to you" indicates to us that there probably were more than one and they were sequential along a path of time that kept directing attention to Timothy, and finally they culminated in chapter 4 of 1 Timothy and verse 14, "Neglect not the gift that's in you, given you by prophecy." In other words, God gave that gift to Timothy and then articulated that gift through the prophecies and then confirmed it by the laying on of hands on Timothy as an act of confirmation by the elders.

So the elders laid their hands confirming Timothy to the ministry because God Himself, through the voice of the prophets through prophecies, had articulated Timothy's ministry. Now, we don't know what He said, but Paul says to Timothy in one place, "Do the work of an evangelist," in another place, "Preach the Word." So those prophecies must have been those that called Timothy to be a preacher and an evangelist and a teacher of the Word of God. So he not only had a command from Paul in this verse, he has a commission, an entrusted set of truth, a deposit of truth, but he also has a confirmation as New Testament prophets have articulated that this indeed is a man called to preach.

You know, I can't help but wish that was the way it was going today. Wouldn't it be great if we came together on the Lord's day and the Spirit of God spoke through one of us directly and pointed out in the congregation who was called to preach? Boy, it would be great. It would simplify so much. You say, "Doesn't the Lord do that?" Yes, the Lord still calls in the heart, but we can't hear His voice. You say, "Well, then how do we know whether a guy's called or not?" The only way we know is to watch his what? His life – to watch his life. But it would be so much simpler if the Lord just told us, and we'd get so excited about that.

But we don't know the content of those prophecies. We don't really know when they occurred, but we know they culminated in the elders of the church laying their hands on Timothy because those prophecies set him apart to preach.

Beloved, may I say to you that I think we need to re-grip the thought that anyone who serves the Lord Jesus Christ in the role of an elder and a pastor, anyone who serves in terms of leadership, articulating the truth of God, is under command, commission, and should be under confirmation of the church. That's so important – so important – so that we are affirmed and assured that they represent the Lord. And they should be those who understand that they are called to do their spiritual duty, that they are entrusted with biblical truth, they are entrusted with the Word of the living God and the Word is sufficient, and the church comes alongside and says, "Yes, this is so."

This was Timothy's responsibility and accountability to the church. He was commanded through the apostle, he was commissioned through the apostles' doctrine, and he was confirmed by prophets who gave prophecies and the laying on of hands of the elders. He had responsibility and accountability to the church to use his gift and war the noble war.

And I find myself in the same position, though in a different way called. I'm under mandate by God to do my duty, I have been given a tremendous trust through generations of people before me who gave me the truth of God, and I am confirmed by the church. I remember well my ordination time. I remember facing 200-some pastors and answering questions for hours and hours. I remember the result and confirmation that my call indeed was legitimate to the ministry, and off I went to fulfill that responsibility as affirmed by the church. And there are times, beloved, in the distress of battle that that's all you have to hang on to. There are times when you say, "I'm not happy with the way it's going, I'm not happy with a lot of things. I'm weary in the battle. I'm tired of the fight. I'm tired of people who come and listen and do nothing about it. I just want a vacation. I want to get out." And all you've got to fall back on is the fact that you're called, you're commissioned, you're commanded, and you're confirmed – and you have no choice.

William Barclay writes about John Knox, the great Scottish preacher. He was teaching in St. Andrews. His teaching was supposed to be private teaching, but many people came because he was so gifted. He was a man with a message. So the people urged him and we read this, "People urged

him that he would take the preaching place upon him. But he utterly refused, alleging that he would not run where God had not called him. Whereupon they privately among themselves advising having with them in counsel Sir David Lindsay, they concluded that they would give a charge or a command to the said John Knox and that publicly by the mouth of their preacher."

In other words, these people said, "This man should be preaching. He should not be holding a private Bible study in St. Andrews; he should be preaching." And he wouldn't force himself, he wouldn't do it on his own, and so the church got together and they said, "We will publicly command him to do that by the voice of our own preacher." And William Barclay says John Knox was a man chosen and yet a man who hesitated to take the tremendous responsibility upon himself.

So Sunday came and Knox was in church. He doesn't know anything about this. He's just sitting in church, and John Rowe, the preacher, was preaching. The said John Rowe preacher directed his words to the said John Knox. He just identifies him in the congregation and speaks directly to him. "Brother, you shall not be offended, albeit that I speak unto you that which I have in charge, even from all those that are here present, which is this: In the name of God and of His Son Jesus Christ, and in the name of these that presently call you by my mouth, I command you that you refuse not this holy vocation but that you take upon you the public office in charge of preaching even as you look to avoid God's heavy displeasure and desire that He shall multiply His grace with you."

Whoa. That's a strange thing to happen to you when you're just innocently sitting in church, to be commanded to avoid the displeasure of God and get on with the matter of preaching. And after saying that, John Rowe said to the people, "Was not this your charge to me? And do you not approve this vocation?" And they answered, "It was and we approve it." The whole congregation confirmed it, whereat the said John Knox, abashed, burst forth in most abundant tears and withdrew himself to his chamber. His countenance and behavior from that day till the day he was compelled to present himself in the public place of preaching did sufficiently declare the grief and trouble of his heart, for no man saw any sign of joy in him, neither yet had the pleasure to accompany any man many days together." He went into isolation and sorrow, so overwhelmed with the duty, so overwhelmed with the commission, so overwhelmed with the confirmation of the people. "John Knox was chosen," says Barclay. John Knox did not want to answer the call, but John Knox had to because the choice came from God.

And years afterward, the Regent Morton uttered his famous epitaph by John Knox's graveside, quote: "In respect that he bore God's message, to whom he must make account for the same, he, albeit he was weak and an unworthy creature and a fearful man, feared not the faces of men," end quote. That is a more modern call to Timothy, isn't it? You have to understand your responsibility to the church when you're called and commissioned and confirmed to preach.

And then just briefly, a look at that second point. In order for us to win the war, the noble war, we have to know our responsibility and accountability to the Lord – not only to the church but the Lord. Look at verse 19: “Holding faith and a good conscience” – stop at that point, and there we’re back to those same two things: faith and a good conscience. We saw them in verse 5 of chapter 1, a good conscience and unfeigned faith – faith and a good conscience. We see them in verse 9 of chapter 3, faith in a pure conscience.

And Paul puts these two things together throughout this epistle. The first one, having faith, means believing in the truth – believing in the truth – holding faith in the faith. The faith being the content of truth and faith being believing in that, so we say believing in the faith. In other words, true doctrine, holding faith, holding the content of true belief and believing in it. We could say it means commitment to believing the truth of God. “Timothy, this is your responsibility to the Lord. You’ve got to hold to the faith. Hold to the faith. You can’t let go of the faith.”

Throughout this epistle, he talks about those who have erred concerning the faith. In chapter 1, those who swerved, turned aside from the faith. Chapter 6 verse 21, those who have erred concerning the faith. Chapter 6 verse 10, they have erred from the faith. He says you can’t do that. You can’t swerve from the truth. You can’t abandon the truth of God, and so our obligation to the Lord in the fulfillment of our ministry is to stay true to the Word of God and then to have a good conscience, and a good conscience simply means a conscience that is pure, a conscience that is undefiled. Remember we said that the conscience is the self-judging faculty that is in everyone that tells you whether your life is right or wrong, and when you have a good conscience, your conscience is saying, “Good, good, good, you’re doing well, that’s fine.” It’s a conscience like Acts 24:16 that is void of offense toward God. It’s a satisfied conscience, a conscience at rest, a conscience that says all things are well, all things are right.

So what are we saying then? Your obligation to God, then, is to hold the truth and a pure life. So we’re back to the two key words in these epistles: doctrine and godliness. You remember I told you that when we first started the study, the two key words would be doctrine and godliness. Truth and purity, faith and a good conscience – same thing, just different ways to say the same thing. Timothy is called to the truth, sound doctrine. He says it over and over again – sound doctrine. Charge those people – chapter 1 verse 3 – they don’t teach any other doctrine. They need to teach the true doctrine. He emphasizes that in chapter 4 verse 6, good doctrine, words of faith, sound doctrine.

And then, of course, the emphasis on godliness. He calls for godliness, chapter 2 verse 10. The women, instead of caring for the outside, should be adorned with godliness. That is purity, moral character, godliness. Chapter 4 verse 7, exercise yourself to godliness. Verse 8, godliness is profitable. Chapter 6, godliness – verse 6 – with contentment is great gain. The call is ever and always to holiness, godliness, purity, as well as sound doctrine. Now, that is the character of one who wins the spiritual victory.

Now, let me say something as we draw this together. Sound teaching and pure living go together. There is an inseparable link between truth and morality, between right belief and right behavior, and I'm going to say something, I want you to write it down and keep it in mind. Theological error – get this – theological error has its roots in moral rather than intellectual soil. Theological error has its roots in moral rather than intellectual soil. The point is this: When people teach wrong doctrine, it is not that they do not understand, it is that they are the base evil – evil – and they have a theology to accommodate their evil.

Don't you for a moment imagine that a false teacher, a liberal, a cultist, an occultist or anyone who teaches falsely around the things of God is some kind of poor, well-meaning, nice person who went astray; they are in error because their hearts are evil, and they will not submit their evil to the cleansing work of Christ and the true gospel, so they invent an accommodating error. And the reason these theologians come along and want to vote on what Jesus said is not because they cannot intellectually know the veracity of Scripture, it is because there are things in the Bible they will not submit to, and in order to avoid unnecessary submission, they will eliminate them. It's that simple.

And so you have the call upon the heart of anyone who is called to ministry to retain true doctrine and true purity of life. You read 2 Peter 2, and you'll see how bad theology and bad morals go together. So the call to a faithful soldier is a call to understand the responsibility and accountability to the church through which we were commanded, commissioned, and confirmed, and the responsibility to the Lord by whom we are called to serve Him with the truth and purity of life. God save the church from error on the one hand, but not only error on the one hand but error taught by corrupt people. You know, that is very common. How many do we hear about who are in the ministry, supposedly teaching the truth, with ungodly lives? And then even doubly worse, those who teach error, and ungodliness is their pattern of life as well.

So Paul says, "Look, Timothy, you've got to war a good warfare, and in order to do that, you have to know your responsibility and accountability to the church and your responsibility and accountability to the Lord as well." And then the last point is your responsibility and accountability to deal with the enemies. We're going to see that one next Lord's day. Let's pray.

Gracious Father, we feel like we have stood on holy ground again. We feel in a way like we've been transported to another time and another place. We've felt the heartbeat of Timothy as the adrenalin pumped through him as for the first time he read those verses, as he sat in that room somewhere in Ephesus and someone delivered this epistle to him and said, "This is come quickly from the apostle Paul – read it," and he realized the battle at his side, and he also realized the calling of God. We understand the quickening of his heart, the fear of confronting such a formidable foe as Satan himself, and trying to deal with false teaching and immorality at high levels of leadership in the church, and we understand the human fear and the human timidity and the anxiety and the sense of

inadequacy, but, O Lord God, we know that that does not diminish the commission nor the command. Father, help us to know that wherever error and evil occur, whether in low places or high places, help us to know that we must confront it. Help us to know that we're in a war, we're in a battle, we have to fight that battle, we have to be in that war, and that means we use the gifts given to us commanded to be used. We teach the Word, which is our commission, that sacred trust given to us. Help us to serve the church as You have equipped us and gifted us to do, and help us also to have a right relationship with You, that of truth and purity. And, O God, may it be that as we together as a congregation live out these things and bring to fruition in our lives the understanding of these principles that we may know great victory for the advance of the kingdom and the glory of Christ.

While your heads are bowed in just a closing moment, there is a war, and you're on one side or the other, and Jesus said, "He that is not with Me is against Me." And if you have not committed yourself to Christ, you're against Him. How long will you do that? I couldn't help but think this week – and I saw all about the terrible disaster in Colombia, tens of thousands of people being instantly killed and sent into eternity. What a graphic illustration that is of the judgment of eternal God. Two months – two months, those people were warned over and over and over and over again to leave and they ignored and they ignored. Reminiscent of the flood that came upon the civilization of Noah, they were warned and warned and warned and warned and they did not heed. I understand even those in the Red Cross were spending their time trying to figure out what to do, and while they were trying to figure out what to do, they too perished.

The Scripture says, "Now is the day of salvation." We don't know – we never know how much time we have, and we trust that the example of Timothy will be the example to all of us of the need for spiritual duty to be fulfilled, holding truth and purity of life, that God's work may be served and that we may fight on His side against the one who so hates Him. What a privilege – what a privilege.

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