

The story is told that our 7th President of the United States (Andrew Jackson) had boyhood friends who could never comprehend how “Andy” became a famous general... and then president. (You see) they knew other’s who grew up with Andy who had much greater talent – yet never succeeded.

One of Andrew Jackson’s home town friends said: “*Why... Jim Brown (who lived right down the pike from Jackson) was not only smarter... but he could throw Andy three times out of four in a wrestling match. But look where Andy is now...*” Another friend (upon hearing this) responded: “*How did there happen to be a fourth time? Didn’t they used to say ‘three times and out!’?*” ... “*Sure. They were supposed to... but not Andy. He would never admit that he was beat – he just never stay throw’d...*” **[P A U S E]**

The moral of this story may be very easy for us to see. THE THING THAT COUNTS IS NOT HOW MANY TIMES YOU ARE THROW’D – BUT WHETHER YOU ARE WILLING TO STAY THROW’D.

Christian! You and I may face setbacks... but we must take courage and move forward in faith. The battle belongs to the Lord and there is no reason for us to stay throw’d.

Now let’s fast-forward 23 presidents later to Calvin Coolidge (America’s 30th President.) Listen to what he said:

“Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not. Nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not. Unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not. The world is full of educated derelicts.”

Today's message is entitled: "Don't Stay Thrown." Paul's words to Timothy in our passage were: "*Wage the good warfare*" (Or as many translations put it: "*fight the good fight*" - which is perhaps more understandable. The ESV translators probably shouldn't have changed it.) ... Timothy must continue to "engage in battle" for the sake of the truth.

I think that Paul sensed that Timothy was about to go AWOL. Timothy was tremendously discouraged. He had been thrown three times. ... Ministry had been brutal... and Paul didn't want him to stay thrown.

Timothy had been ministering in Ephesus for an unknown length of time by the time Paul wrote to him. ... Someone reporting to Paul (undoubtedly) noticed the early signs of battle fatigue on Timothy's face... and Paul urged the younger minister to remain at his post - despite the church's failure to respect Timothy's role as their spiritual leader.

All of us are in a fight for the gospel. We're in a war... brothers and sisters in Christ... in our lives... in our marriages... and in our families. ... As we face – what are (no doubt) – the final seconds before the rapture... things are getting and will continue to get progressively worse. ...

In case you haven't seen this in a while... Allow me to read to you from Matthew chapter 24 (the Olivet Discourse)... which describes the birth pangs (just before Jesus meets us in the air... and takes us away with Him.

Matthew 24:6-12 (ESV)

⁶ And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. ⁷ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. ⁸ All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. ⁹ "Then they will deliver you up to

tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. ¹⁰ And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. ¹¹ And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. ¹² And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.

It is this last part that *marks for me* – that we are in those times right now. We are seeing many fall away from the church world-wide... an angry culture that betray's... (which accurately describes what we know, here in America, as “Cancel Culture”) and inflamed hatred and explosive racial tension ... and our once stable nation that the world looked up to because of its strong foundation of law is now as unthinkable as lawless (as ANY corrupt third-world government.) I simply cannot watch television news anymore – and I used to be a “news junkie.”

Matthew 24:32-34 (ESV)

³² “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. ³³ So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁴ Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

In the meantime... we studied a verse in 2 Thessalonians a few weeks back that tells us what we are to do.

2 Thessalonians 3:13 (ESV)

¹³ As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good.

We are to keep at it. We are to be doing what Paul tells Timothy in our opening verse for today: “Fight the good fight.” “Wage the good warfare...” “Don’t stay throw’d.”

This battle will look differently in each of our lives... but do not be caught off guard—you are in a war. So fight the good fight... in these last days. Here

is what our passage today will instruct us to do: “Stand strong amid all the challenges that come from outside and (sad-to-say) inside the church...”

The battle rages fierce for anyone who answers God’s call to be involved in ministry in the church (and every believer has been called.). ... When you answer that call... you might be able to identify how things (that at first) seem very exciting. But disillusionment will eventually set-in as the reality of evil... begins to diminish your idealism. ... (It is not my intent to seem pessimistic – but it is even less to be unrealistic.) ... All elements on earth (including the church) is a war zone... an invisible... all-out struggle of evil to destroy good. ... Satan *hates* God and everyone serving Him. But God’s people must take their place in the battle lines.

Paul encouraged Timothy to stay in the battle despite the apparent gains won by the enemy. Jesus already has assured us ultimate victory over evil; therefore... the only way for a person involved in church ministry to lose - is to quit the fight. ... [P A U S E] ...

Every year at this time... the elders and I see traces of Timothy’s “battle fatigued discouragement” in our church. We understand why people are reluctant to say “yes”... when we ask if they would serve in a church office for the coming year. ... They know the hardship of what we ask... they have lived it... and they are not interested in re-engaging (too quickly) in spiritual warfare. Many deserve a well-earned rest... and we get that.

But my prayer is that you will go before the Lord... and determine between you and Him – if He is calling you to continue to fight the good fight.

Much prayer is called for... if you are ever asked to come to the battlefield of ministry leadership. You need to know that you have been called by

God. (You see) one of the first things we see in Paul's encouragement to Timothy... is a reminder that God has called Timothy into this fight.

1 Timothy 1:18

Life on the battle field is not easy or fun. ... So Paul uses a few different images to encourage Timothy.. The first is a term of endearment to do so—He calls Timothy “*my child.*” ... Paul cares about him and is not just barking out orders.

That personal... affectionate word... must have encouraged this young man's heart. “*Paul considers himself to be my father. He loves me as a son. He trusts me. He believes in me...*”

This imagery of a son needing his father to believe in him struck me forcibly these past few weeks... as I prepared for this message. ... It resonated with me how important it is for a fatherly figure to believe in you.

My own father was a good physical provider... a man who showed his love to me (as his son) by providing all my physical needs growing up... and even the resources for 4 years of secular college. But he was very distant. I never once heard him tell me that he loved me or that he was proud of me. He never came to any of my athletic events in High School or dramatic performances in high school or college. He chose not to attend my high school graduation and he decided to miss my college graduation (even though he was in town at the time.)

I said that he paid for my secular college education... making it clear that he did not want his son to be a pastor. ... (Dad did not know the Lord.) I knew that God had called me to be a pastor... and Patti and I (like

everyone else) paid for seminary (which is post-college.) Those were tough years... but we somehow made it... and eventually I was looking for a church that needed a pastor.

Well... the placement office of the seminary posted a pastoral position for a church in the town where my father was raised. ...And I saw that the head of the pastoral search committee was a man whose name I often heard while growing up. He introduced my father to my mother... and he was the best man in my parent's wedding... Over the years... his name was often mentioned.

In those days... there were NOT very many pastoral openings... so I decided that I would take a chance with this one. ... But I remembered my dad telling me when I was in college that he did not want his son to be a pastor. What kind of a dynamic would that be... if I became the pastor of his close friend...?

I called my dad and told him what I was about to do... and his response was not at all what I had expected. He told me for the first and (only time) – *“Son... I am proud of you...”* He said: *“I know how hard seminary was for you... Your mother and I watched how you persisted through many hardships. In fact I am going to call Leland right now and tell him that they probably won't find a better candidate.”*

I didn't get the job. I didn't even get an interview. They were looking for someone who had at least 5 years of pastor experience. BUT – my point is... it was powerful to know that my father believed in me. THAT has helped me to hang in there during difficult times of ministry...!

You may not be a spiritual father (like Paul was to Timothy)... but is there someone who sees you as a spiritual leader? They need your encouragement. Every church needs spiritual encouragers. What keeps you from encouraging someone who is in the trenches of ministry?

It helps a great deal for a son to know that his father believes in him and trusts him. My guess is that Timothy was greatly encouraged by Paul's word in verse 18. Paul urges him on to the task of waging a good warfare... by reminding Timothy that his father believed in him and had confidence in him.

But not only that. Paul was not through. He doesn't even get to the next verse before he pours more encouragement out. (You see) he reminds Timothy that there were certain prophetic utterances.

I said there were a few things that Paul does in verse 18... to encourage Timothy. The first was to use an endearing term that told him "*I believe in you...*" The second thing Paul does is that he reminds Timothy that God called him.

Timothy had received a call from God by means of prophecy. This reminded Timothy that his calling to Christian leadership was from God and he could rely on the same source to carry him through. Many pastors (young and old) have found encouragement in recounting their call to ministry.

In 2011 when I earned my doctorate of Ministry... I wrote my doctoral dissertation on this very issue. I studied the relationship between a pastor's sense of call - and their endurance and joy through ministry hardship. What surprised me the most about my research... was the

number of pastors who do not believe that God calls a person to ministry. About 10% of those I surveyed could not identify a distinct call to ministry. One of those pastors (who could not identify a personal call... and who told me that he does not believe that God issues such calls) is a personal friend. He was an excellent preacher – but he has been out of the ministry for nearly 10 years now.

My research concluded that around 70% believed they had been called and linked their ministry endurance and joy to it. ... Personally... I know that I would not have lasted three years in ministry – if I did not have a strong sense of call. ... And I believe that it is just as important to know God has called - before serving as an Elder... Deacon... Deaconess... Bible Study leader... or any office of the church.

By remembering and being assured by Paul that Timothy had not chosen himself... but that the Lord had chosen him... Timothy would be helped to continue faithful and effective. In Christian leadership it is essential to have objective criteria... such as the investigatory approval of the church (for me... this was an ordination)... or clear instances of guidance from Godly men and women... or Scripture... or circumstances of opportunity that is the Lord's making. to fall back on and appeal to, when opposition arises to one's work for Christ.

Timothy was there by divine appointment. God had chosen him and sent him. It was this fact that could give him assurance in difficult days.

Having a definite sense of calling is essential for fighting the good fight. Let me now point out some of the other essentials that Paul brings out in our

passage today. We turn our attention (now) to **How to fight well.** ... Our fight is both internal... as well as external.

1 Timothy 1:19-20

How to fight well. First we'll deal with the internal.

These verses will not do us any good – if we do not understand the importance of conscience... and exactly what “conscious” is. The Apostle Paul made such a big deal about conscious... while we tend to minimize it's importance.

If we are to fight well... we must hold on to “a good conscience.” Three other times in the Pastoral Letters... Paul referenced the importance of a healthy conscience. ... In 1 Tim 1:5 he told Timothy that the purpose for commanding the elders to stop teaching false doctrine was to bring them back to “love, which comes from a pure heart and a *good conscience* and a sincere faith.” ... In 1 Tim 3:9 we will see Paul write that church leaders “must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a *clear conscience*.” In 2 Timothy 1:3 he substantiated his own ministry, saying, “I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a *clear conscience*.”

The rest of the New Testament testifies to Paul's empowerment through “a good conscience.” He courageously took his stand before the Sanhedrin, looked them straight in the eye, and declared, “My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all *good conscience* to this day” (Acts 23:1). Then standing before Governor Felix he confidently declared, “So I strive always to keep my *conscience clear* before God and man” (Acts 24:16). To the Romans Paul voiced his amazing affirmation of love for his people as true because it was spoken with a clear conscience: “I speak the truth in

Christ—I am not lying, my *conscience* confirms it in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 9:1). Thus we see that for Paul “a good conscience” is at the very root of fighting the good fight.

So let’s make certain that we know what the conscious is. ... There is a great deal of misunderstanding – even among believers. Many think (and maybe you are one of them) that “conscious” teaches us right from wrong. Boy! That is so dangerous to think that way!

No. the conscious is given to us (rather) to help us resist any deviation from truth. It doesn’t teach us what is wrong. It helps us not to select that option. (You see) conscious works with an understanding of what we already know about right and wrong.

If you think conscious indicates what is right and what is wrong... then you are well down a wrong path of relying on feelings to determine what is right and what is wrong. If it feels right – it must be! How can something that feels so right – be wrong! (You see) that is where it leads.

(LISTEN!) Conscious insists that we do right - and avoid doing wrong. God’s Word informs us of right and wrong – and conscious steers us into selecting “right.” ... It informs us when we are beginning to fail or fall away from the right path. ... Ignoring God’s warning system (our conscious) is why lives get shipwrecked. “*I know what You want God... but I don’t care. I’m taking option B...*” People who do this consistently sear their conscious and shipwreck their faith.

Some habit may be okay for others... but for you it is wrong - because your conscience says it is. ... There may be an attitude or thought pattern that no one else would feel guilty about – but if you allow it... it will be at the

expense of your conscience. ... It may be an attachment that is wrong... but the only voice telling you so is your conscience. ... If your inner voice calls out to you – don't ignore it. ... Do not sin against your conscience. This is all so hard — especially today when conscience is dismissed as a mere safety device. God's Word is clear — we must cultivate “a good conscience.”

“A good conscience” grows a sound faith and is essential to fight the good fight. ... I can stand up to substantial pressure if my conscience is clear. But without a clear conscience, there is no power to endure or resist

How can we fight the good fight - internally? Simply by “holding on to faith and a good conscience” ... On the one hand... we must hold on to the *objective* deposit of the “faith,” meaning our Biblical convictions... our doctrinal beliefs from Scripture. On the other hand... we must hold tight to the *subjective* treasure of “a good conscience.”

So I will now say a quick word about the objective faith on which we must have a solid grasp. We need a solid grasp on the objective content of our faith. The deeper the knowledge of our infinite... loving... merciful... gracious... holy God - the deeper our love will become. The sad truth for so many Christians is that their love of God languishes due to their lack of knowledge of Him. They simply do not know much about God. They may have a relationship with Him... but it is stunted by their ignorance of Him.

Evangelical ignorance is a fact. Most Christians cannot name the Ten Commandments. Many cannot even name five of them. Many do not even know where they are found. If we are to love God as we ought... we must

know the doctrine of God... the doctrine of Christ... the doctrine of salvation... just to name a few.

Begin by learning one book... perhaps Romans. Know its theme... its divisions... its unity. What you know and believe about God is everything... because what you know and believe will determine how you live. Doctrine determines conduct. Right doctrine makes it possible to “fight the good fight.”

How can we fight the good fight - internally? Simply by “holding on to faith and a good conscience.” ... But sometimes it becomes necessary to fight the good fight in an external sense... as well.

Having taught in Ephesus for three years Paul knew the history of the congregation... its individuals... and families. So he is able to name two of those who did not hold onto faith and a good conscience - **Hymenaeus and Alexander**. ... Hymenaeus is mentioned again for denying the bodily resurrection (2 Tim. 2:17f.)... He did not hold the faith... and Alexander may very well be the coppersmith who had done Paul so much harm (2 Tim. 4:14).

Did Paul write these two men off? Not at all! Rather, he “handed them over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.” ... The purpose was corrective — so they would learn “not to blaspheme.” ... Paul used the same language in 1 Corinthians 5:5... where he said, “*Hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.*” Here Paul fervently hoped that both Hymenaeus and Alexander would be restored.

Paul cast Hymenaeus and Alexander out of the church—away from God’s care and protection and thus under the power of Satan. It was Paul’s intention that they be buffeted by Satan and that *their separation from God in this way* be made very real to them.

Many church members today will throw up their hands in horror that a sinner should be so exposed as to be named publicly. But they are uninformed of the purpose of publically exposing men like Alexander and Hymenaeus. The reason they are named is to protect the innocent (who... if not knowing who they are... can be beguiled by these evil men.) Evil needs to be exposed so others will not be hurt by evil. If a tornado is headed your way, no one is upset if a specific warning is given. But when it comes to sin, all manner of arguments are brought out to oppose exposing sin. Satan loves this, for he does not want to be exposed.

Church offenders like this needed **to be taught not to blaspheme**, otherwise they will destroy themselves, and pull down others with them.

From this we learn three things:

- serious failures of a theological or moral kind need to be confronted by the leaders of the church.
- suspension of membership rights and even excommunication are appropriate penalties in severe cases.
- church discipline should aim ultimately at the good of the offender as well as the church (1 Cor. 5:4f.)

The message is clear: We, like Timothy, are called to “fight the good fight.” It is both internal and external. We are to hang on to “faith” and hang on to

“a good conscience.” Second... we are to expose defiant evil for the good of the offender as well as the church.

We're in a war. So fight the good fight. Stand strong amid all the challenges that come from outside and inside the church. Have you been throw'd. Don't stay throw'd. Keep “faith and a good conscience.”