

The Minister's Duty: Stay True and Pure

By Jeff Noblit

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Anchored in Truth Ministries

1915 Avalon Ave.
Muscle Shoals, AL 35661

Website: www.anchoredintruth.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/anchoredintruth

1 Timothy 1. We're looking at verses 18 through 20. Let's read that together. 1 Timothy 1, beginning in verse 18.

18 This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight, 19 keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. 20 Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme.

Now this whole exposition on preaching series through 1 Timothy we're calling "Beautify the Bride: Her fashion and her function." The church, the local church for us is the bride of Christ and we're supposed to fashion this church and function as a church in a way that honors his wisdom, that is, his word; in a way that shows forth his beauty and his power. The church can't be of us, it can't be according to our wisdom or our cleverness, or our ingenuity. It must be of God's wisdom and according to the word of God so we want to fashion her and function as God has ordained and these pastoral epistles beginning with 1 Timothy, give us much practical guidance on how the church is to be designed, set up, function, and serve the Lord. Now in this section of Scripture, we're talking, we're looking at a section where Paul is giving the young pastor, Timothy, some vital instructions on his role here and I call this "Stay True" or "The Minister's Duty: Stay True and Stay Pure." That's what Paul's gonna tell him, "Now Timothy, stay true to your calling. Keep the faith." And then he's gonna say, "And keep a good conscience." Stay true and stay pure.

Now, while this is addressed to a pastor, there are powerful parallels for all of us so don't think you can tune out and say, "Well, ah, he's just talking about preachers this morning." No, there's two points to that. 1. These truths apply to all of us. We're all to strive to stay true, to be anchored in truth, to stay grounded in sound doctrine about what we believe about salvation, about Christ, and about the church. That's your job, too. It's my job to lead you in it but it's your job too, and we're all called to maintain a clear conscience as we strive forward in our service to our Lord in our communities and certainly through our local churches. Now the second thing is you're called of God to stand with your pastor as

he's trying to be true and he's trying to lead us with a sound or a clear conscience. So it's for all of us and we must stand together in this pursuit.

Now let's look at it together by unpacking it this way. 1. He tells Timothy here, "Stay true to your calling." Stay true to your calling where he says in verse 18, "fight the good fight." Interesting phraseology there, fight the good fight. That's what he says clearly in verse 18. Now go up to verse 3 and you'll see he's already hitting on this and I'm confident and most scholars agree, that you have to reflect back on verse 3 as to what specifically Timothy was to be fighting about, if you will, ah, at the church at Ephesus. He says in verse 3, chapter 1, "As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct," or charge, "certain men not to teach strange doctrines." Now again, there was some false teaching that was arising in the church. I mean, at every time Paul went to a city, it seems like if you'll study the New Testament, about the time his heels are walking out the door, some contrary unsound doctrine sneaks in and Paul spends his energy sending Timothy or the like of Timothy or going back himself and trying to straighten it out. Often he would send letters like he did to Corinthians or, or to the Galatians etc. to clear up their drifting back into unsound doctrine. It is a never-ending war to guard and defend the church against unsound teaching and unsound practice. That's what he's pointing out to Timothy.

Now when he says fight the good fight, then he continues on in the next verse, "keeping faith." Fight. You can say fight the good fight of faith. Now the word "faith" here doesn't mean that thing that arose in your heart when you believed on Jesus. In this context, the word "faith" means that body of doctrine we hold to; that teaching; the biblical teaching or truth or doctrine, doctrine just means truth, that we hold to. He said, "Fight to keep sound in your doctrine." Now if you want to amplify that out and get the whole context of what it means when God tells a minister to fight the good fight, here's what he's saying, "Hold to and preach the truth and found and build true churches." Those two things: hold to the truth, preach the truth, and spend your energy, energies to build and found true or biblically healthy churches. That is what it means when a minister is called to fight the good fight.

Now this doesn't mean be successful, this doesn't mean grow the biggest crowd. Hopefully God blesses you with a lot of numbers if you're a pastor, but it means be true to doctrine and true to building the church God's way for God's glory. Now Paul's telling Timothy to do what he had modeled before Timothy and was modeling before Timothy already. 2 Timothy 4:6 and 7, he replies to Timothy as he's thinking about the end of his life and the end of his ministry, he says, "I'm already being poured out as a drink, ah, offering," ah, metaphorically he's saying, "I, I'm poured out. I'm at the end of my life. The time of my departure has come," but he says, "Here's what I've done, I have fought the good fight." He said, "I didn't just fight, I fought the good fight. I finished the course." Now he didn't mean all fighting's over, he said, "My part of the battle is coming to an end. I finished the course. I've kept the faith."

So now back over to our text as Paul tells, "Now Timothy, you now fight the good fight." The word "good" there has the idea of inherently or intrinsically good. It's the one thing

worth fighting over. Are you hearing me, church? Ah, we have a decorator lady here, Miss Amanda, does our decorating and she does such a good job for us, and, ah, there may be some of you that think, "I wish the carpet had been this, this tone, or I think the carpet had been pretty in that tone," and that's okay. We've all got opinions but we don't fight over that, and I'm not saying that because somebody's been ugly about it because nobody has, I'm just saying we don't fight over that stuff here. We just not gonna do it. That's not the good fight, that's silly fleshly fighting. The good fight is what Paul's talking about, that which is inherently worthy and worth the battle and the sweat and the bloodshed. There is nothing more important than the God-called pastor staying at his post and faithfully upholding the faith, the doctrines once for all delivered to the saints, and defending that faith until he receives orders from on high of his dismissal.

Ah, some people ask me sometimes, "Brother Jeff, do you think you'll ever retire?" My answer is, "No, I don't plan on it." I may change some things about what I do and how I do it as God, ah, may, my health may be affected positively or negatively. Who knows? I don't know. You don't know. Nobody knows that. But I don't plan on leaving the fight until I'm dismissed. Now sometimes older warriors are better for the team instructing and guiding and not out there in hand-to-hand combat, that's for sure. We wouldn't want General Schwarzkopf during Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm to have been out there in the trenches fighting the Republican Guard. No, we needed him back guiding the troops. The fight may change but you don't leave the fight.

Now this is the pastors but, brothers and sisters, can I charge you: yes, there are times when God brings us into good seasons, amen, when we don't have the strife and the division and the, the, the, ah, contentiousness and the opposition that we may have felt at one time, but we're always ready and we're always committed whether we feel like it or not. Count on me, I'll be in on the fight if it's the good fight, if it's over the things that really matter. And of course, that's one of the things we have to mature, ah, in as pastors is to learn what things are worthy fighting over and what things are not.

Ah, many years ago when finances were tight here, I remember, um, ah, we had stopped having our church picnic. We'd spend a little money on that and it's a great thing, by the way, and we've had some folks join our church who their first Sunday back or visiting with us was at the picnic. Now you don't join a church for the picnic, you'd better, you'd better not join this one or you'll be badly disappointed because it's not a picnic all the time. Huh, but hey, we, we, we're not here to have fun but we can have fun while we're here. Get that.

Anyway, we had stopped having the picnic and, and a man came to me and, ah, well, actually he came to the elders and said, "I think we ought to do some things like this. Let's have our picnic again." He didn't get it out of his mouth until I said, "Okay, we'll have it." Not worth fighting over. It just doesn't matter. We had a little money that year and I said, "Well, have it." Look, I don't, it ain't about me getting my way but if you came in and you wanted to change something about small groups or how we approach conversion or things like that, he'd better have a boatload of Scripture and church history

behind him. I'll fight you there. There are things worth fighting over but there are things that are not worth fighting.

Well, anyway, he tells Timothy, "Fight the good fight." It's the minister's duty to stay in the fight all the way to the end. Now again, if you're talking about fighting the fight of faith as a God-called minister, keep these two things in mind: preaching the truth, building true churches. Preaching the truth. Building true churches. There are those who would preach the truth but they're very weak on building true churches. That, it's a, it's much easier to yell about the truth than it is to actually implement it in a local church body. That's where a lot of the fighting happens, if you want to be, be honest about it. As we, we mentor pastors at Anchored in Truth Ministries, we find these dear brothers trying to implement things that you guys embraced decades ago and they said, "Man, I, I, I preached about it and everybody said amen, and then I start, we started doing it, and everything's coming unglued around me." That's the good fight.

You know, some ministers don't fight the good fight because they don't even know there is a fight. To them it's just as the generations have unfolded or denominations tend to become a bureaucratic system or a big machine. I know what I'm talking about here, and it's very easy to learn how does this work and let me find out how I can fit into this big machine whether it's the Methodist denomination or the Presbyterians, or the Southern Baptist Convention, let me figure out how all this works and I'm pretty sharp, I'll get in on this and I can be successful. They don't even know there is a fight and far from upholding and defending the faith, they outright sometimes will tell you, "You know, we're not that concerned about doctrine. Doctrine can be divisive. We want to be successful." Well, my friends, Paul told Timothy to fight the good fight of faith which means the doctrines we hold to.

Now there are doctrines that we can, that are secondary things, the Bible doesn't emphasize them heavily, that we can all disagree on but there's some foundational things like what is the Gospel, what constitutes true conversion, who's a real candidate for baptism, etc., those things are essential doctrines. We can't get weak and wobbly there and most of our churches are very weak and wobbly on those points. So far from upholding and defending the faith, they're actually de-emphasizing the need to defend and stand for sound doctrine.

I've heard them sometimes say to me, "Well, the only thing that's really important is 'getting people saved.'" Now in today's culture, you have to stop and say, "Well, time out. What do you mean by getting some people saved? How do you define that?" Or like I like to say, say sometimes, "Getting saved from what?" Now what they really mean is is punching a ticket into heaven and missing hell. That's wonderful and a part of our overall conversion but that's not all you're getting saved from. Hell's not all you're getting saved from. Are you getting saved from yourself, your own self-will? Are you getting saved from the world, that is, following the precepts and the ideals and the values the world embraces? Are you getting saved from loving the world and you're beginning to love the Gospel and love Christ and love his church more? Are you saved in those ways because, my friend, listen to me, if you are not being saved, in that process of being saved from

loving self and loving the world and treasuring the world's values unto loving Christ and loving the church and loving the truth, if you're not being saved in that flow and in that direction, then you're not one of the ones who is going to be saved from hell in the eternal state. So what they mean is basically is we've learned how it works. We get our children mostly to say that prayer, we all stamp them as saved, we run them through the baptismal waters, and what they end up doing is packing the church roll full of people who are not really born again and they can't really have a spiritual ministry because they don't care for scriptural ministry because they've never been really saved, and we keep dumbing things down and dumbing things down.

Well, let me go on. Some pastors don't fight the good fight because they don't know there is a fight. Some pastors don't fight the good fight because they've quit in the fight. They're like Job's wife, they started out then they looked back. They put their hands to the plow and then looked back instead of staying focused ahead on the goal and on being obedient to God's command to fight the good fight. They begin to hear and they begin to observe that there are new ways to "do church," new, clever, easier ways to be successful in church work, so they step away from the fight, they get loose on doctrine, they begin to pay attention to the world and what people in the world are excited about, they begin to bring some of those things into the church and they really lead the fight.

Some just play fight. You ever see one of those Civil War reenactments? They're pretty impressive. I kinda like them myself. I mean, those guys are in authentic uniforms, they have the authentic black powder rifles, except the mini-balls. They shoot those things, it sounds just like it would've back in the Civil War. Sometimes they have canons. They have bayonets on their rifles. They go to those old battlefields and as far as history can reveal to us, they reenact those battles. Everything about it is great to watch except it's a rehearsal, it's not real. I mean, the night before, they have one of those reenactments, those soldiers do not lie awake in bed full of horror and fear of what might be their fate the next day. The reason they don't lay in bed worried is because the next day it's not a real battle, it's just a rehearsal, it's just a reenactment.

And many a pastor flies the banner of charging forward with the cross, sounding forth the faith of sound doctrine, building the church to be a true church, when really they're just screaming and yelling in the pulpit but the people are not moved because the people know there's not going to be any real follow-through in church life. That's not fighting the good fight. If a commanding officer gives many stirring exhortations to his troops but the troops are never called to go into battle, soon the exhortations fall on deaf ears and too many pastors, and therefore too many churches, proclaim they're in the good fight but in reality it's just like a reenactment, it's just play fighting, they never really enter the fight.

Some pastors leave the fight to become fight coaches. One of the frustrating things to me is I see guys who haven't pastored long or they haven't pastored well but they're very gifted writers and communicators, and they leave their local churches and go into conference speaking and blogging and book writing to help all the rest of us learn how to be good pastors when they haven't done much of it themselves. They didn't fight long and they didn't fight hard and they didn't fight well, but they're super-good writers about it.

I've used the illustration often with pastors, I'm sure I've used it with you, if you go in to have a surgery and you ask the doctor, say, "Doc, how, how, how many of these surgeries have you performed?" And he said, "Well, I've never done one. Never done one and I've never done one. Man, I went to school, I studied all about it and I've written some of the best books on this surgery you'll ever read, but I've never actually done it." You're gonna say, "Well, just keep up your speaking and book writing program, you're not operating on me." Why do we allow that in the, in the, in the spiritual world? I mean, if I'm gonna sit under somebody, I want to have you pastored well and have you pastored long, not just are you a great communicator of great doctrine. There's a difference between writing about the fight and fighting the good fight.

Paul didn't tell Timothy, "Now Timothy, write some great books about that." And by the way, that's a good thing to do if you've done it. I'm glad Paul wrote a lot about what he did in fighting the good fight, it's helped me, and I've read many wonderful pastors who were faithful fighting the good fight and it's greatly helped me, and I've had people pounding on me, "Pastor, try to take some time and put down in writing the things you guys have learned at Grace Life. It will help others." I just haven't found the time to do that but I'm saying it's okay to write but make sure you've got something to write about.

Some people leave the fight to become fight coaches, and then some like Paul and as was proven on in time, Timothy, they enter the fray and they fight to the finish. Paul was not talk, Paul was not rhetoric. He believed sound doctrine, he defended sound doctrine, and he worked tirelessly to shapen the local churches to live out that doctrine in church polity, in church life. You see, Satan is just not very concerned if you just preach about the faith and don't act on it, but if you build a church on it, if you expect church members to live like they believe it, if you expect the church to strive in sanctification, to be biblically sound and to be what I call a true church, never perfect but at least true, then I want to tell you something, do you know what that is? That's a fight. Satan hates it. The world hates it. The own, the pastor's own flesh is against it. Your church members are against it usually. It's a fight to get there.

No wonder Paul told Timothy, Paul leaves and all of a sudden the church at Ephesus has got false doctrine being taught, and I imagine Paul sitting there in prison writing this letter says, "Oh my goodness, Timothy's just started and he's gotta go out there and the blood's gonna fly. He's gotta go out there and straighten up some messes that are already starting in Ephesus." But he tells Timothy twice now, the same chapter, "Timothy, fight the good fight."

Well, a couple of quick subpoints here under this. First of all, this is Timothy's mentor's mandate. The mentor's mandate. He's saying here, "This I command you," as we talked about last week, and Paul says that in verse 18. He's saying, "Now Timothy, this is not an option for a man of God. This is not a suggestion." I had many pastors talk to me when I was a young minister. They'd say, "I'd suggest you do this. I'd suggest you do that." Well, Paul's not saying I'm suggesting anything, Paul's saying, "Timothy, what I'm about to tell you about fighting the good fight is a non-option. It's a command. It's a charge given to

you by your mentor." It should matter what men before us, or for you ladies, ladies before you, who have proven in godly lives, it should matter to you what they think. As a matter of fact, ladies, are you listening to me? You should look to older ladies and do what they tell you to do. Young men, if you think you're, ah, deacon quality or small group leader quality or God's called you in the ministry, look to those who've gone before you who are mentors and listen to what they say. Paul is saying to Timothy, "I'm charging you. I'm your mentor. You've watched my life and ministry, you know who I am. Listen to what I'm telling you."

And I'm so grateful that I was taught very early in ministry to honor the authority of those over me in ministry, and by purposing to honor those over and over me, I did many a menial task. I did many a project, a ministry event or exercise that didn't fit me. I was uncomfortable. I didn't enjoy it, but guess what? My mentor told me to do it and I was committed, I had to do it.

I remember when I was nearing graduation from the university here in, in, in Florence and, ah, Brother Bob and Brother Noel here who were two of my mentors said, "You're going to graduate school. You're gonna study theology." And I said, "Yes, sir." And they said, "And you're not going to this one and this one and this one, you're going to this one. You're not going the liberal one, you're going to this one." And I benefited. I didn't even question them, I said, "Amen. Here we go." I went to Memphis and I enrolled in the graduate school of theology there and I began looking for a church to serve in there, and I spoke at two different churches and a whole bunch of people claimed they got saved, it seemed like God blessed me, and none of them would call me to minister, and I guess Brother Bob felt sorry for me. He said, "Well, just stay here and drive back and forth. Let's see how that works." Well, it's been 38 years. I guess it worked. But my point is it didn't matter about the finances, it didn't matter about the difficulty, it didn't matter about the drive, my mentor said, "You're going to graduate school and you're gonna learn some more about theology."

Listen to your mentors. Paul's telling Timothy, "Listen to what I'm saying." One of my mentors used to say all the time, it rings in my mind today, "Stay by the stuff. Stay by the stuff." Do you know what he meant was? He meant there's some core doctrines that you build your life and ministry on and you don't get caught up in the sideline gimmicks and junk that goes around.

Listen to your mentors. If you're starting a business, you're a young businessman, go to some of the businessmen in these, this church that been at it for decades, have honored the Lord, given out of their business to support the Lord's work, been generous. Look at those men and listen to them. Listen to them. And on and on and on we could go.

The context here, of course, is, is ministry and having mentors in ministry and let me say this to you again: young men, young ministers, rather, who are independent spirited and tend to go rogue usually crash and burn given enough time. It catches up sooner or later. What's the point? It's a lack of character. It's not a lack of ability, it's not a lack of skill,

it's not a lack of, ah, ah, ah, of speaking skill, it's a lack of character because they didn't submit to their authorities.

I, I had a lot of growing to do when I became your senior pastor, but oh, how much I would have had to learn had I not submitted for eight years to my pastor before that. You ask, you call, you contact Dr. Bob Pittman and ask him. We'd be down here, he had his office upstairs, he's a pretty big guy. Remember him? Pretty big man, and he'd say, "I need my coat." I ran upstairs and got his coat. You know why? Because my mentor needed his coat. And I, I, I'm distressed about some of the young people today. Not, not, not necessarily our folks. We have some fine young people, I mean generally. This arrogance. This disdain. This, these imbeciles who parade themselves like they know everything and they don't know nothing and haven't learned anything. You need the character building of submitting to a mentor.

Well, that's what Paul is to Timothy. "I'm your mentor. I'm charging you to do this." Secondly, he tells Timothy, "Fight this good fight of faith, um, because the church commissioned you to do it. Your church, your local church commission." Look at verse 18. Um, "in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight." Paul said, "I, your mentor, am charging you to keep fighting the good fight but also your local church publicly set you aside in something of an ordination, um, meeting. Your local church had identified that you had God's hand on your life, that you had God's calling in your life, and they, they in something of an ordination ceremony set you apart." Now we don't know exactly how this looked. We do know that they laid hands on him and we do know they prayed over him and we do know because this was the New Testament era and there were prophets functioning in the church in those days, that they were prophesying about Timothy and I'm sure it was about this very point, that Timothy was going to be a faithful valiant warrior fighting the good fight for sound doctrine and sound churches. That's why he says it this way.

Um, we know in Acts 13, basically the same thing happened with Paul and Barnabas. The church set aside Paul and Barnabas and they prayed over them and commanded them. It's the idea and we do the same thing today, it's where we discern that God is calling this man into Gospel ministry and we are agreeing with God, is what we're saying. We're not starting anything God hasn't already started, we're just agreeing with what God has already started, and as a church we're publicly affirming that. And by the way, you've got no business going into the ministry or going anywhere in the ministry if your elders and your church do not do what Timothy's did to you, formally set you apart and give you their blessing. This was a vital and important step. Paul, the esteemed Apostle Paul, went out after his local church at Antioch commissioned him to the task and he's telling Timothy, "Your local church has already done this." In 1 Timothy 4:14, he reflects on this very thing where he says, "Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery," the leaders who laid hands on you and prayed over you and now sent you out to this task. So Timothy's local church probably in Lystra, we don't know for exact sure but probably so, had affirmed and commissioned him to this ministry to fight the good fight. So, "Timothy," he says, "stay true to your calling. Stay true to your calling. Fight

the good fight, holding and proclaiming sound doctrine and building true churches. It's going to be hard at times. It's going to be a fight. Stay at it. Don't quit. Don't quit. I'm your mentor, I'm telling you to do it. Your church has set you apart for this purpose."

Now, II., he tells him to stay pure in faith and in conscience. Stay pure in faith and in conscience. Do you know what your conscience is? I never forgot this. I, I read this years ago. A, a, a Christian missionary was speaking and teaching a, a, a native American, a, about the biblical concept that God's put a conscience in all men and, and the native American who'd never even seen a verse of Scripture said, "Oh, I know what that is." And the missionary said, "Well, what do you mean you know what it is?" He said, "I know what a conscience is." He said, "It's that triangle thing in my chest and it's got sharp edges on each point of the triangle, and when I do something wrong or even think something wrong, it begins to turn and it cuts inside there and it hurts me." That's, that's a good understanding. That's a God-ordained ministry within us and the point that Paul is telling Timothy here, if you get into stuff, impure things, and you begin to embrace them and walk in them without repentance, what you do is you start to dull the points on that triangle and pretty soon it can just spin around in there and not cause hardly any trouble at all. That's one of the most dangerous things that can ever happen to anyone is to learn how to not listen to or defile the conscience. He says, "Timothy, listen to that." Some of you sitting here this morning, God given, the God blessed ministry of the, the conscience in you is, is bothering you right now. Now he's telling Timothy, "In your work in the church, be faithful and keep a clear conscience."

Can I challenge you, church member, do you have a clear conscience about your service to your church? Do you have a clear conscience about your attendance in God's church? Do you have a clear conscience about your financial support of God's church? Do you have a clear conscience about your service to your brothers and sisters in Christ in the small group in your church? Paul says, "I command you to keep faith, stay true in your faith, and have a clear conscience."

A continual embracing of sin without repentance eventually wears those edges dull and then you have what the Bible calls a seared conscience and it's about the worst thing a person can do to themselves. "Preacher, I don't think that's wrong. I don't think that's bad." No, of course you don't, you seared your conscience. God's not speaking to you because he stopped. He tried but you kept going on and now God's silent. Now you're left to your own devices. If you think you're on that road, you know what you must do, you must humble yourself and say, "O God, I repent. Please speak to me again. Please convict me again. Please trouble me again." 1 Timothy 4:2, Paul talking about these false teachers and others who would mislead the church, how far they had gone in, and in, in, in searing their own conscience, "by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron." You put a branding iron to flesh, it just toughens it. You can't, it's dead, it kills the nerve endings, you can't feel anything anymore.

Paul says some have done this. Look at your, look at our text again, 1 Timothy 1, look at verse 19, "keeping faith and a good conscience," those always go hand in hand, "which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith." Literally it's "the

faith." They no longer hold to the doctrine they used to hold to. They no longer really believe the things about Christ and the things about, taught in Scripture like they used to. They've gotten kind of like, "Well, it's kind of loose. Well, we don't have to be that firm about those things anymore." And here's the problem: doctrine hasn't changed, what's good and right in Scripture hasn't changed, what happens is something inside of them has changed. Holding to true doctrine and having a clear conscience always goes hand in hand. Many a person starts off embracing the doctrines of the faith, holding to the things that matter, and then as time goes on we find some of them even denying the faith and my question is what happened? And sometimes I've had people actually say this to me, they'll claim, "Well, we used to hold to things the way you hold to it." The way I hold to it doesn't matter, how did Jesus hold to it? What does thus say the Scriptures? What did our forefathers in the faith hold to? That's what matters. They'll say, "Well, we used to believe it that way but we've grown now. We've matured beyond that." Actually what they're saying is we've entered an elitist category. We don't have to follow all that stuff y'all believe anymore. We found us a, what they're really saying is we found us a way to be fully worldly and just check off the box I'm going to heaven and just live like the world.

You see, listen, when you sin and sin and embrace it without humbling yourself and striving in repentance, then you begin to sear your conscience and you begin to embrace immorality – now listen to me, don't miss this statement – a man's morality always dictates his theology. A man's morality always dictates his theology and pretty soon you need to find So-and-so's book out there he's written and find out how he twists things around so that it leaves you comfortable in the sins you've begun to embrace. It's not a matter of sin or not sin, all of us sin, it's a matter of embracing sin, growing comfortable with it, and, and, and, and coddling, if you will, that sin in your life, and you'll lose. And here's what, here's what Paul tells Timothy, "Timothy, are you listening to me? If you let yourself go in sin, you'll end up denying the very faith you're supposed be fighting to defend." Because we get into sin and we want a Christianity that matches our sin, that makes us comfortable in that sin. Now look, we all unfortunately commit sin. The Bible says if you say you don't sin, you're, you're calling God a liar. We all commit sin but we must never never never never never embrace sin and there's a difference.

I've talked to you about this for decades, I told you decades ago we're on the downgrade in Baptist life, we're on the downgrade in evangelical life in general. We began turning our heads the other way and basically just not paying any attention when people lived in wanton outward adultery, and wanton outward fornication. "Well, they, everybody's going to do it. Well, it's just the way it is. Well, we just, we want to love them." All this nonsense and now today, now today, now today leaders, leaders among Baptists are starting to say, "Well, now homosexuality probably isn't quite the sin we thought it was. We're not really sure God's really all that upset with it." What's next? We're already killing our babies born, or, or, or preborn. Where did all this come from? It came from not fighting for the faith and maintaining a clear conscience. I've been telling you for decades. Everything I told you has come to past. But I'll tell you what we're gonna do at Grace Life Church, we're gonna keep repenting, amen? We're going to keep fighting that crap we find in our own lives and we're not gonna let one another embrace sin to where

we go shipwreck in regards to the faith. We're not going there. We're gonna fight for each other and fight for the church and fight for the glory of God in this church. Amen?

And I'm just a gnat's hair away from publicly proclaiming we no longer in any way affiliate with the Southern Baptist Convention. Just a gnat's hair. And the only reason we, and we, well, we're only about a gnat hair connected now so you remove one gnat hair, it's over, and we're barely barely barely connected now, and my primarily because they, they blackballed me. They, they separated from us, and do you know why they separated from us? We're too much of a conviction. It's just the truth and God help us as weak as we are, as puny as we are, as faulting as we are, that we're a conviction to anybody. Are y'all with me this morning? I just can't tolerate this nonsense.

Warren Wiersbe had this in his commentary concerning pastors and pastors maintaining a clear conscience, and he's talking about a, a pastor living an outward life that's obviously compromising. He said one man said of his pastor, quote, "He's such a good preacher, he should never get out of the pulpit because he's such a poor Christian." And that meaning he should never get in the pulpit.

Well, the conscience is a wonderful gift from God. Let me say this about, about your conscience. Good night, I'm way behind. The conscience is this wonderful gift from God. Now, now, now get this about the conscience: the conscience must be informed by sound doctrine. It must be informed by the Scriptures. If not, your conscience will speak things to you that aren't real clear. It will condemn you when you shouldn't be condemned. It'll confirm you when you shouldn't be confirmed. You've gotta go to the book and make sure enough of this book is going... Remember last week I told you one of my jobs was to be a brain transplant on you? You keep transplanting the old thinking what's good and bad and right and wrong out of your brain, you keep implanting in here what is right so that that God-given capacity in you starts working. You inform your conscience with the word of God and then when something happens, your mind has the word of God to inform the conscience and the conscience goes, "Boom, how does that feel?" And when it goes boom and cuts you and hurts you, "Praise God you're helping me, Lord." Are you with me, church? Thank God for it.

Your conscience has to be informed by the Scriptures, the truth of Scripture, and then your emotions must honor the conscience, then. When your emotion says shame, your emotion says guilt, your emotion says you ought to be ashamed of yourself, your emotions say that's wrong, you're dirty, you know what you ought to do? Then you follow up your, you should say, "That's exactly how I should feel." That's, now some of you moms and dads, I'm gonna, some of you moms and dads, when your child disobeys and they feel bad, good, you should feel bad. Don't you explain it away. Don't you teach your babies to violate their conscience, teach them to honor their conscience. Now you might have to help them inform the conscience with the truth but don't teach them to violate their conscience. "Well, they're just young." I'll tell you what, they're just little devils is what they are. Now we love them unconditionally, amen, we give our lives for them but we love them too much to let them learn that sin is not sin and evil is not evil and wicked is not wicked. It is. So when your conscience says that's wicked, say, "Yes,

Lord." Now here's what that means: you informed your conscience with the word of God, your emotions honored what the conscience said, then your will kicks in and honors the conscience too and your will says, "Lord, I call it what You call it, it is sin. It is wicked. If every man in the world is doing it and thinks nothing about it, this man will not. I'm gonna call it what it is and I repent because I'm going to be a fighter and a repentor of sin. I'm not going to embrace sin."

Well, the church, the local church is of supreme importance to the Apostle Paul so he's telling this young preacher, "Now preacher, stay the course. Fight the good fight of faith. Hold onto those sound doctrines. Embrace them, preach them and build sound churches. That's the fight you've got to be in and you've got to realize as you go forward you're gonna have to keep a clear conscience." That'd be, that'd be the one thing Satan will try to do to you because if he can get you to keep violating your conscience and not reacting and not responded biblically and repenting like you ought to, then he will slowly chisel away at the foundation of sound teaching in your heart and mind and then you'll start preaching it in your church.

Thirty, 35, 40 years ago, Bill Hybels started Willow Creek Church in Chicago, got to like 20-25,000 people in attendance and, oh, everybody was going stark raving mad over Bill Hybels. Bill Hybels. Bill Hybels. Bill Hybels. I'm not saying he's an all evil, I'm not saying he didn't do anything right but one of his primary foundation stones was this: make the church comfortable to the world around it and stop talking about sin. Oh, he'd say he got people saved, he got them to pray the prayer. Make the church feel like and look like the world around you and don't hardly say anything about sin, that'll run them off. Bill Hybels has resigned the church after at least eight different women have accused him of sexual immoralities. He didn't end well.

Church, are you, are you sitting up straight? Are you listening this morning? When you start seeing and hearing pastors go soft on the great doctrines of Scripture we've all, our forefathers died.... Can I say it again? Your forefathers died over them. Died over them. And we start getting too slick and too clever to preach it straight and preach it right, don't be surprised given time sin comes out and we realize they went shipwreck according to the faith because they violated their conscience.

Do you know this sermon would get me fired from most Baptist churches? I'm not, I'm not, I'm not just blowing smoke, it would literally get me fired from most Baptist churches.

The church is of supreme importance to Paul because the local church is the center of God's purposes and God's glory for both time and eternity, so Paul tells Timothy, "Timothy, hang in there. Keep fighting the good fight. You must be fit for the task of keeping the church healthy and true. You must stay true to your calling and you must stay pure." Does that mean you never sin? Well, if it does, I need to resign right now. It does mean this, you can stay in the fight and you can keep calling sin what it is and you can keep repenting, you don't have to embrace sin; you might fall in the mud hole but don't be there next week.

Four minutes, 30 seconds, max.

III. Naming names, bringing shame. Verse 20, Paul tells Timothy, he says, "Timothy, I just, just, just to drive this in, just to make sure, Timothy, you're not missing anything here, remember Hymenaeus and Alexander," see it there in your text, verse 20? Hymenaeus and Alexander. He said, "That's exactly what these guys did." Now we don't know exactly which Hymenaeus and Alexander this is. Some guys say, "Well this is the Hymenaeus mentioned over in 2 Timothy as a false teacher." It could be. "This is the Alexander who's Alexander the coppersmith in 2 Timothy 4." Could be but we don't know this for sure. One thing we do know for sure they were obviously church leaders in the church at Ephesus and they got loose on morality and they got loose on integrity in the ministry, and then they began to fail in their doctrinal convictions and Paul said, "I've turned them over to Satan."

Um, a lot to say here and I preached about this a lot in the past. We haven't in recent years, I understand that, but when Paul says in verse 20, "I have turned Hymenaeus and Alexander over to Satan, ah, that they might be taught not to blaspheme," that's church discipline and that's what every church is supposed to do. Now I'm not the Apostle Paul, I can't do it like that. We have to bring things to the church and go through the steps the New Testament gives us, but turning one over to Satan means they refused to even try to repent when confronted. They held to their immoralities and they held to their weakening or false doctrine they began to hold to, those always go hand in hand, immorality, unsound doctrine, immorality, unsound doctrine. So Paul said, "We've, we've kicked them out. We've removed them." And he said, "I'm turning them over to Satan."

Now what does that mean? Here's what you've got to understand: the devil is God's devil. That's what Martin Luther said. The devil is God's devil. The devil's not out here just doing what he wants, he's doing what he does all to the, to the perfect ends of divine providence to fulfill God's will and bring glory to God, and so there's times when the church can remove someone and when someone is removed like Hymenaeus and Alexander, 1 Timothy 1, excuse me, verse 20, you're taking them out of the covenant protection of the local church and into the dominion of Satan that they might be broken by the devices of Satan. It's almost like Hymenaeus and Alexander wanted to run with the devil, okay, we're gonna give them to the devil, and then God has ordained that that by, by, by, by excommunicating Hymenaeus and Alexander, Satan might bring them down and humble them, the prodigal son at the feed trough, and they might come to their senses and be taught to stop this blasphemy of false teaching in the church. So if I come to you one day with the elders back up and say, we're asking So-and-so, we told him not to teach this anymore now we're asking the church to exclude them, we're doing it for their good that they might be taught not to blaspheme and teach unsound doctrine.

Now when that happens, Hymenaeus and Alexander are removed from the protective covenant of a local church and they're put out under the direct devices of Satan, one of two things is going to happen: they're either going to be broken and repent and come back and say, "We're wrong. It's what you say it is because it's what the Bible says it is

and I want to be right with God and back in the sheepfold." What do we do then? We wrap our arms around them like nothing ever happened and love them and welcome them home, and we've had quite a few of those here. If they do not humble themselves, if they do not repent and come back, then that identifies them as impostors, they are not genuinely God's, and they should have been outside of the local church membership. One of two.

Now here's the point as we conclude everything. Jeff Noblit, Matt Fowler, all of our staff, are you as laity of the church, as we continue on you will either grow lax in the fight, quit fighting, go to the world, or and be like Hymenaeus and Alexander, that's very unlikely you'll be ever dismissed before the church, usually folks just disappear, you'll either end like Hymenaeus and Alexander or you'll end like Paul and Timothy and you get all the way to the end and say, "Man, I blew it at times, I was weak at times, I, I failed my Lord at times, and I've certainly had to repent and change course at times, but by God's grace, I got back up, I went back again and I've come to the end and I can say I fought the good fight." I want to end, I want you to end not like Hymenaeus and Alexander but like Paul and Timothy and if I could just say this, what a marvelous motivation we have when to one extent or another we have hundreds, literally thousands of churches to one level or another that are looking to us and say, "We need your help and your example and your mentorship." We must stay the course. We must fight the good fight.