

Fighting the Good Fight

October 15 – 1 Timothy 1:1-20

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Day 287 – 78 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We transitioned to Paul's first letter to Timothy, who was Paul's protégé (v.2; Acts 16:2, 3) and representative to the churches, especially after his imprisonments (1 Tim. 1:3). While Acts ended with Paul imprisoned in Rome, we can piece together, from both historians and scripture, that he was eventually released (62-64 AD). However, after a "fourth missionary journey," he was imprisoned again, this time to be executed (66-67 AD).

Evidently, after being released from his first imprisonment, Paul revisited Ephesus (v.3). Before his first departure from Ephesus, he had warned the elders that "savage wolves" would arise to devour the flock, referring to false teachers (Acts 20:28-31). Paul's prediction came true. False teachers had infiltrated the church at Ephesus. **Thus, after Paul's second departure, he left Timothy behind to "fight the good fight" in his place (1 Tim. 1:3, 18).**

To fight the good fight refers to "keeping the faith and a good conscience" (v.19). To keep the faith was another way of saying, "Stay faithful to the gospel." **The gospel — the life, ministry, example, mission, and teaching of Christ — is the bullseye. Teaching anything other than the gospel misses the target.** Paul referred to off-target teaching as "strange doctrine" (v.3). Myths (traditions, legends, stories, fables, fiction), endless genealogies, and misuses of the Law "do not further the administration of God" (v.4).

The goal of any teacher in the church should be "love (genuine concern for others) from a pure heart (not deceitful or misleading), a good conscience (blameless before God and men), and a sincere faith (true to the gospel, v.5)." A teacher who strays from these things has "turned aside to fruitless discussion" (v.6). Paul described sound teaching as "according to the glorious gospel" (v.10, 11).

Paul had already done his part. He had cut the proverbial head off the snake by confronting the blasphemy of Hymenaeus and Alexander (v.19, 20). In fact, he had already "handed them over to Satan," which is probably a reference to excommunication or setting them outside the church (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:5). Now, Paul expected Timothy to protect the church from any more snakes in the grass.

Daily Reflection

Using the Law (Old Testament scriptures) was not the problem in Ephesus. It was the false teachers' misuse of the Law that concerned Paul. "The Law is good when used lawfully" or rightly (v.8). The Law was meant to convict us of sin and point us to Christ (v.9, 10). But even those who misuse the Law, or are condemned by it, are not outside the grace or mercy of God. Paul used himself as an example (v.12-17). He admitted to acting in ignorance, and God got his attention and showed him the truth. The same transformation can happen to false teachers.

However, it is up to us to fight the good fight of faith today. False teachers are not just a thing of the past. They are very much a threat to churches today. Are we vigilant and alert to the dangers among us? Are we discerning the messages and filtering them "according to the gospel?" **Keeping the faith is a good fight to fight.** Are you in or have you tapped out?

What does it require of you to "fight the good fight and keep the faith"?

Good and Acceptable

October 16 – 1 Timothy 2:1-15

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Today in Your Reading

Paul began to instruct Timothy on how to set things in order in the church. He started with prayer for the lost, which the Ephesians had not been doing routinely. "I urge that prayers be made on behalf of all men..." or all people, even those in authority, **"which is good and acceptable in the sight of God,** who desires all men (people) to be saved" (v.4).

The word *all* here can be misleading. Scripture tells us that many people will not follow Christ. So then, this verse cannot be used to support the false doctrine of universalism, that all people will be saved. In the context of the rest of the Bible, God desires to save people from all walks of life. He will bring all kinds of people to knowledge of the truth (v.4).

To clarify the meaning of *truth*, Paul gave a clear presentation of the gospel (v.5). "There is one God," he wrote, with whom we are not in a right relationship because of sin. We need a mediator (go-between) to help us reconcile that relationship. The only person eligible to be that mediator is Christ. Why? An effective mediator must represent both parties, in this case God and mankind. Because Jesus was born of a woman, He was human. Because Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, He was and is God. In theological terms, this is called the hypostatic union, meaning that Jesus was (and is) fully God and fully man. He is the only person capable of reconciling the relationship between sinful people and a holy God (v.6).

Next, Paul addressed two improprieties in the Ephesian church, that of the appearance and authority of women. The women in Ephesus were evidently distracting others from worship by their appearance (hair style, jewelry, and clothing). So then, Paul's instructions included a general principle and a specific application. The general principle relates to every church, but the application of that principle may be different in each church. What was the principle? "I want

women to adorn themselves with proper clothing..." he wrote (v.9), which addressed the issues of modesty and discretion. **Since we are at church to worship God, women should not wear anything to distract from that purpose and draw attention to themselves.** If they draw attention to themselves, it should be because of their good works (v.10).

Regarding authority in the church, Paul wrote that women are to "quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness" (v.11). He added, "I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man but to remain quiet" (v.12). Remember, the setting is the church, in particular the general assembly or corporate worship (v.8). **In that setting, the roles of teaching, praying, and governing were given to men, particularly the elders** (v.8; 3:1-7). Women were called upon to respect their authority and submit to their leadership.

Daily Reflection

Paul's support for establishing male leadership in the church is grounded in creation and the Fall (v.13, 14). This leadership role aligns with God's intention from the beginning, as man was created first, and as Eve was the first one deceived by the serpent. Evidently, women in Ephesus were being deceived by false teachers (5:11-15; 2 Tim. 3:6, 7). **Male leadership does not insinuate that women are any less equal or important. It simply means that men and women have different parts to play.**

For example, Paul wrote, "Women will be preserved (rescued, redeemed) through the bearing of children..." (1 Tim. 2:15). He was not referring to salvation but to their significance in God's plan. Despite their part in the Fall, women play a vital role. They are most fulfilled by having children and raising them to love God. Their role as mothers redeems their status, as key influencers of the next generation. As the famous poem says, "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world" (William Ross Wallace).

Shepherds and Servants

October 17 – 1 Timothy 3:1-13

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Today in Your Reading

Paul proceeded to address the two church offices — overseers and deacons (v.1). The Greek word for overseer is *episkopos*, which describes a superintendent. Paul also referred to them as elders (*presbyteros*), which means a pastor or shepherd (*Acts 20:17, 18, 28*). Thus, elders and overseers refer to the same group, the God-ordained earthly leaders of His Church.

The elders are always mentioned in the plural, meaning that each church should have more than one. The plurality of elders protects the church against rogue or dictatorial rulers, and it allows for collaborative leadership and joint ministry to the church. **The role of elders is that of stewards or managers of God's house** (*1 Tim. 3:5*). Some of their responsibilities include leading, teaching, praying for, pastoring, and protecting the people of God. It is a Spirit-led calling, which Paul called "a fine work" (v.1).

Because of the heavy responsibility that eldership entails, these men should exhibit certain qualities (v.2, 3). To discern whether these men are good managers, Paul told Timothy to observe their families (v.4). It makes sense that if they cannot manage their home, then they will not be able to manage the church (v.5). Elders should be men of tested faith who have a deep love and appreciation for the church (v.6). They should also be men of integrity with a good reputation.

While the Bible has much to say about eldership, there is little we know about deacons. In the two places in Scripture where deacons are mentioned (*Phil 1:1; 1 Tim. 3*), they are listed alongside the elders, so we know that they serve in an official capacity in the church. They are also listed after the elders, so we know that they serve under the leadership of the elders. However, what exactly are deacons supposed to do?

The Greek word for deacon is *diakonos*, which can be defined as a table waiter, a servant or attendant, an envoy or messenger, or an assistant. Our first glimpse at deacons is in the early church (*Acts 6:1-7*). The Disciples were overwhelmed by the growing numbers of believers. They could not meet all the needs. After a complaint arose among some widows, the Disciples charged the people to select seven men to assist them, so that they could continue teaching and praying. **Working together, the two groups met the needs of the church, and the gospel continued to spread.** While the words *elders* and *deacons* are not found in *Acts 6*, we see the teamwork of leaders and their assistants working hard for the benefit of God's people.

So then, deacons are servant-leaders who assist the elders in meeting the needs of the church. With having this responsibility, and executing their duties with delegated elder authority, deacons are required to be qualified (*1 Tim. 3:8-13*). They must also be tested before they serve (v.10). Since Paul did not specify how to test them, every church is at liberty to determine their own methods to examine the life, faith, and character of their candidates.

Amid the qualifications for these men, Paul inserted four qualifications for women (v.11). It is unclear whether these women were deacons, assistants to the deacons, or deacons' wives, so churches today have different interpretations and application of this passage.

Daily Reflection

Together, elders and deacons are essential to the health of the church. They ensure that both physical and spiritual needs are met. **It should not surprise us that these two offices reflect the character and ministry roles of Christ, who was both the good Shepherd and the best example of a servant-leader.** Unhealthy churches are usually symptoms of unhealthy leadership. Selecting the right men can prevent a multitude of wrongs.

Be All In

October 18 – 1 Timothy 3:14-4:16

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Day 290 – 75 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul warned Timothy of a time of apostasy or falling away (4:1-5). He wanted the Ephesian believers to know how to conduct themselves, to represent well “the household of God, which is the pillar and support of the truth” (3:15). To fall away from the faith means that a believer is taken captive by deception (Col. 2:8).

People fall away from their faith because they pay more attention to deceitful spirits, false doctrines, and worldly myths than they do the “words of faith and sound doctrine” (1 Tim. 4:1, 2, 6). How are we to combat apostasy? How do we ensure that we do not fall away from the faith? Paul gave us the answer.

First, **we shield ourselves by “constantly being nourished on the words of faith and sound doctrine”** (v.6). By studying the genuine artifact, we can easily spot the counterfeits. To be nourished means to be supplied with food to grow. Unfortunately, by neglecting God’s Word, many Christians are malnourished and weak.

The second way to avoid apostasy is to discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness (v.7, 8). While we should take care of our bodies, our bodies are temporal. They will not last. Our spirits, on the other hand, are eternal (v.8, 9). Therefore, we should invest more time in our spiritual fitness than our bodily fitness.

We do not perfect godliness overnight; neither do we drift into godliness by accident. Godliness is intentional, and it requires time and effort. Paul used the word *discipline*, which insinuates training, exercise, or practice. We can discipline ourselves for spiritual fitness and usefulness. Thus, we call these exercises the spiritual disciplines (i.e., worship, prayer, giving, serving). The most important discipline is Scripture intake. All the other disciplines are informed by and revolve around Scripture intake. Without it, the other disciplines are (or can be) misguided or misunderstood.

The third way to avoid apostasy is to “fix our hope on the living God, who is the Savior” (v.10). While there are so many things to distract our attention, it’s important that we keep our eyes on Jesus. Our hope is not in ourselves, in others, or in any worldly thing. Our hope is in Christ. We must pursue Him!

Fourth, Paul told Timothy, a young man, to “show himself an example of those who believe...” (v.12). **Our relationship with God should not just be mere talk, but it should be evident in our walk.** Unfortunately, youthfulness has a stigma attached, that young people are unwise, immature, inexperienced, and irresponsible. However, spiritual maturity is not dependent upon one’s age. Just as there are spiritually immature elderly people, there can be spiritually mature young people (like Timothy).

Fifth, **to avoid apostasy, we should focus on our spiritual gift** (v.13-16). Paul wanted Timothy to combat the false teachers by sharing the truths of God’s Word, which fell in the parameters of his spiritual gift. The Spirit equips us with at least one ability to serve and bless others, to do the work of ministry. None of us should neglect our spiritual gifts, but rather we must exercise them for the good of others to the glory of God.

Daily Reflection

Paul told Timothy to “take pains with these things. **Be absorbed in them**” (v.15). The word *absorbed* is not in the original language. Paul’s original words were “be in them,” meaning to be engrossed in these things, to be consumed by them. **Simply put, be all in.** “Persevere in these things,” Paul wrote (v.16). Don’t give up!

We are all works in progress. None of us has arrived at our destination. Therefore, we should all be advancing, moving, growing, charging ahead, and never apathetic, plateaued, or neutral. There is no such thing as neutral in the Christian life. We are all in and moving forward, or we are falling away. Which is it for you?

Honoring Widows

October 19 – 1 Timothy 5:1-16

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Today in Your Reading

Paul continued instructing Timothy how the church of God should operate. First, he explained how to relate to church members of all ages. Then, he addressed caring for widows.

Confronting false teachers would require young Timothy to rebuke some older men. Paul warned him not to rebuke them in a harsh manner, but rather to appeal to them as fathers, respectfully, rather than reprimanding them like children (v.1). He instructed Timothy to appeal to younger men as brothers, like a mentor who gives wise counsel (v.1).

Next, Paul told Timothy to appeal to older women as mothers, with gentleness, kindness, and respect (v.2). Finally, Paul encouraged Timothy to “appeal to younger women as sisters (v.2). A good brother will treat a sister in a kind, gentle, and protective manner. However, with young women there is the element of physical attraction. Thus, Paul warned Timothy to be above reproach with “all purity” (v.2). Church leaders must set moral boundaries and have accountability to prevent falling into sin.

The second topic Paul addressed was widow care. The Lord expects widow care to be a high priority for His people. (*Deut. 24:19-21; Acts 6:1-7; Jas. 1:27*). **The followers of Christ are called to love and care for one another, especially those who are most vulnerable.**

Paul started this section with a simple command, **“Honor widows who are widows indeed”** (v.3). Who are widows indeed, and what does it mean to honor them? In this sense, to honor them could include meeting their practical needs. However, if too many widows relied upon the church for help, then the church would suffer. Therefore, Paul clarified that only widows indeed should receive financial support. A widow indeed is one without family, who has been left alone after her husband has died (v.4, 5).

Before a widow turns to the church for help, she should first turn to her family. As a mother, she has earned the right to be cared for, having invested so much time, money, and effort in her family over the years. Families who do not care for their widows “have denied the faith and are worse than unbelievers” (v.4-7, 16). Neglecting family members is a reproach on Christians, the church, and Christ’s teaching.

However, before being put on the list of widows to receive care, Paul provided requirements (v.6-16). For example, Paul set the age limit at sixty (v.9, 11). A woman who is sixty or older would most likely not remarry. Therefore, she would need financial help. Younger widows need to get remarried, lest their desires distract their devotion to Christ (v.12, 14 15).

A qualified widow must be the wife of one man (v.9), meaning faithful in marriage. She must have a “reputation for good works” (v.10). She must have invested her life in raising godly children. She must have “shown hospitality to strangers” (v.10). She must have “washed the saints’ feet” (v.10), meaning that she loves the church and is an example of service. She must have “assisted those in distress” (v.10). If a woman has not assisted others in their distress, how could she expect for the church to assist her in a time of distress? Finally, she must not be an “idle gossip or busybody” (v.13).

Daily Reflection

How are you taking care of the widow(s) in your family in a way that honors the Lord? How do your church leaders demonstrate discretion as to who they help with physical needs?

Double Trouble

October 20 – 1 Timothy 5:17-25

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 292 – 73 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

While Paul addressed many topics in this letter, regarding how the church should function, most (if not all) of them have revolved around its leaders. The Ephesian church suffered from wayward, ungodly, unbiblical leadership. So then, Paul again concentrated on leadership, specifically how to install, protect, reward, and even admonish elders.

First, Paul instructed Timothy to honor examples of good leadership. **In fact, those who rule and preach or teach are worthy of double honor** (v.17). To rule here is to lead, oversee, or manage. The church is to be led by elders (plural), not by deacons, not by a single pastor, not by staff members or domineering congregants. While the tasks of elders and others may overlap, ultimately the responsibility and accountability fall on elders (*Heb. 13:17*).

Elders are not only to lead out in the decision-making, or governance, of the church but also in the ministry of God's Word. While preaching and teaching are similar, Scripture separates the two (*Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 4:13*). Preaching involves speaking God's Word and exhortation, exposition, and/or admonition to convict and affect life change. Teaching is more instructional and includes knowledge-based explanation and practical application.

Because Paul distinguished between ruling, preaching, and teaching, some churches distinguish between ruling elders and teaching or serving elders. Other churches combine the two roles into one office.

In this context, honoring elders could include meeting their practical needs. Thus, Paul supported his statement with Scripture. (v.18, *Deut. 25:4; Lk. 10:7*). Notice that he used Old Testament and New Testament references, meaning that they are equally authoritative as God's Word.

Because elders' leadership, responsibility, and ministry are vital to the health of a church, **the men in that position should be held to a high standard, scrutinized, and held accountable for their actions**. Honorable leaders are targets for spiritual attack, temptation, and sin. Therefore, Paul provided instructions for how to accuse, discipline, and rebuke apostate elders, all of which should be done "without bias or impartiality" (*1 Tim. 5:19-21*).

The idea is that elders should be protected from flippant accusations but, at the same time, they should be held accountable for wrongdoing. The process of rebuking an elder should even be done publicly, to demonstrate the seriousness of sin and prevent others from the same mistakes.

Daily Reflection

Much of the headache of poor leadership can be avoided in the selection and testing process.

Thus, Paul said, "Do not lay hands on anyone too hastily..." (v.22). In other words, churches should not be in a hurry when choosing or commissioning elders; rather they must take their time and select men of character.

Otherwise, instead of having elders worthy of double honor, they will have elders who prove to be double trouble, and they will have been responsible for their appointment. Most of the time, both the good and bad of men are obvious (v.24, 25). Members are not responsible for sins that are hidden from them, but to appoint men with obvious character flaws is a shame, and they will pay for it.

Have you ever witnessed a pastor or elder in trouble? How was the situation handled?

Guarding Against Greed

October 21 – 1 Timothy 6:1-21

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 293 – 72 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We finished Paul's first letter to Timothy. He returned to the theme of combatting false teachers, particularly those "who suppose godliness to be a means of gain" (v.5). But **Paul challenged Timothy to "fight the good fight of faith" and "guard what had been entrusted to him" at all costs** (v.20).

It seems likely that false teachers were stirring up slaves (servants, employees) in Ephesus to rebel against their masters. But Paul charged them not to do that, as it was not befitting a Christian (v.1, 2). Furthermore, a Christian rebellion would cause people in the area to despise the gospel. Christians, who are under authority, should always act respectfully.

Then, there were men in Ephesus who were feigning godliness for gain (v.5). These men did not agree with the gospel of Christ but were seeking to get rich (v.3). The result of their schemes produced envy, strife, and suspicion in the church (v.4). Paul referred to these men as evil and ignorant (v.5).

However, Paul confirmed that "godliness is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment" (v.6). **Contentment frees us from the trappings of money.** To be content is to keep one's desires within limits, to be satisfied with the minimum (v.7, 8). Such an attitude gains us peace of mind, an internal rest, and an unselfish and generous heart.

Discontentment, which is a dissatisfaction at the present state of things, does not allow our mind to rest. Discontentment is often caused by comparing ourselves to others and believing that the grass is greener on the other side, that more stuff produces more happiness. Before we know it, the enemy has caused us to lose focus on the things that matter, to chase that which does not matter. Thus, **Paul issued a severe warning —greed is insatiable and destructive** (v.9). **It will lead us away from our faith** (v.10).

Money itself is amoral, meaning neither right nor wrong, good nor bad. When money is viewed correctly, as a gift of God to be used for His glory, then money can be a good thing. Paul condemned the love of money, the desire to be wealthy, not money itself (v.10). Much of the evil and oppression in history was motivated by someone's desire for more money. That worldly desire can only be replaced with Christlike contentment. **A mature believer, who is content with what God provides, will find freedom from greed and its destructive tendencies.**

Paul told Timothy to "flee from these things" and, instead, fight the good fight of faith and pursue true godliness (v.11-16). By doing so, Timothy would be "taking hold of the eternal life to which he was called" (v.12). A life that honors Christ is more than just what we say no to. It also refers to that which we say yes.

Having gobs of money is not what life is about, so why would we "fix our hope on its uncertainty"? That is a waste of time (v.17). We must see money for what it is, a gift of God's provision, to be used to meet our needs, yes, but also to use for His purposes (v.18). When we do good with God's money, we are "storing up treasure of a good foundation" in heaven, "taking hold of that which is life indeed" (v.19). True life is about the future, not the present.

Daily Reflection

Paul told Timothy to "guard what had been entrusted to him" (v.20, 21). The enemy is constantly trying to rob us of our contentment with Christ and His provision for us. How are you guarding against greed and its effects?
