

Wage the Good Warfare

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[0 : 00] 1 Timothy 1, verses 18-20. If you're there, would you please stand with me as we honor the reading of God's word together.

The Apostle Paul, writing to Timothy, a young pastor in Ephesus, tells him, This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith in a good conscience.

By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.

May God add a blessing to the reading of his word. Would you please be seated? Tonight is the Super Bowl.

The Super Bowl is the biggest sporting event in our country. It's an event so big that it transcends the world of sports. By that I mean even someone with no interest in sports at all, like Pastor Tyler, knows that the Super Bowl is tonight, and because he's my friend, he'll be rooting passionately for the Chiefs.

[1 : 36] But even if you're not a sports fan, a lot of people will still watch the Super Bowl, even if it's just to watch the commercials or gather with friends. But as you watch the game, or any football game, you'll notice the commentators often use war language and military terminology to describe the action.

The quarterback is sometimes called the field general, who throws bombs or deep passes as he marches his team down the field into enemy territory.

Often they'll say football games are won in the trenches, using trench warfare to describe the linemen who form up around the ball, which is placed in the neutral zone as they prepare to battle on the front line to take ground or to defend their territory.

The defense will use a rapid attack to assault the quarterback called a blitz, which comes from the German word blitzkrieg, which describes a surprise attack designed to catch an opponent off guard in order to defeat them quickly.

Like football, the Bible uses a lot of war language to describe the Christian life. But unlike football, the Christian life is not a game.

[3 : 01] There are no timeouts. There are no halftimes. The opponents we face don't merely want to beat us. They want to destroy us. The reward we seek isn't a perishable trophy, but an imperishable crown of glory.

The battle transcends what is material, what we can see. It is a spiritual war that rages between God, the holy creator of the universe, and Satan who seeks to blind eyes, harden hearts, and deceive minds to the truth.

Unlike tonight's football game, the outcome of this battle, this spiritual war has already been determined. Jesus Christ, our warrior king, has already won the war for us through his sinless life, his sacrificial death, and his victorious resurrection.

This is the testimony of God's word. So why, we wonder, does Satan continue with this fight that he has already lost and is destined to lose?

The Bible says that Satan is a deceiver who has bought into his own deception, his own delusion that he is like God.

[4 : 21] Ezekiel 28, verses 12 through 19, and Isaiah 14, verses 12 through 14, are scripture passages specifically addressed to the king of Tyre in Babylon. However, they allude to the spiritual power behind those wicked rulers, namely Satan.

These passages describe his pride and delusion, which ultimately led him to fall from heaven. Let's look at Ezekiel 28, 12 through 19. Son of man, raise a lamentation over the king of Tyre and say to

him, Thus says the Lord your God, You are the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.

You were in Eden, the garden of God. Every precious stone was your covering, sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, jasper, sapphire, emerald, and carbuncle.

And crafted in gold were your settings and your engravings. On the day that you were created, they were prepared. You were an anointed guardian cherub. I placed you.

You were on the holy mountain of God. In the midst of the stones of fire, you walked. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till unrighteousness was found in you. In the abundance of your trade, you were filled with violence in your midst, and you sinned.

[5 : 38] So I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and I destroyed you, O guardian cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Your heart was proud because of your beauty.

You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor. I cast you to the ground. I exposed you before kings to feast their eyes on you. By the multitude of your iniquities and the unrighteousness of your trade, you profaned your sanctuary, so I brought fire out from your midst.

It consumed you, and I turned you to ashes on the earth in the sight of all who saw. All who know you among the peoples are appalled at you. You have come to a dreadful end and shall be no more forever.

This description in these verses could only apply to Satan because the king of Tyre was not the signet of perfection. It was not the signet of perfection. He was not present in the Garden of Eden. As a human being, he could not have been an anointed cherub, which is an angel. And no man other than Adam prior to his sin could describe himself as being blameless. Satan was a high-ranking angel, perhaps the highest-ranking angel.

[6 : 40] He was on God's holy mountain. He dwelt in God's immediate presence. Understanding how a perfect being in a perfect environment could sin remains a mystery to us.

However, this does not change the fact that Satan did sin, rebelled against God, and he fell from heaven. As Ezekiel described Satan as the great power behind the king of Tyre, so Isaiah shows him to be the great power behind the king of Babylon and sheds light on what motivated his fall. Isaiah 14, 12 through 14 says, Satan's desire in delusion is that he is like God.

It's the same delusion he used to deceive Adam and Eve. It's an intoxicating delusion. It's a lie that appeals to our flesh to be like God, to be our own authority, to do whatever we want without consequence, and to receive worship from others for that thing that we do.

This is a lie that Satan fights for. This is the delusion, the deception that he seeks to enslave people with. This is why Satan opposes God at every point, targeting Christ and his redemptive work in attacking his church, whose mission is to carry out Christ's mission, to proclaim his gospel, preaching and teaching the truth that disciples would be made and that the kingdom of our Lord would advance on this earth.

[8 : 34] God has given us his word which reveals Satan's battle plan against us, that we, as the Apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 2, 11, would not be ignorant of his schemes.

As it pertains to the church, we know that Satan schemes to infiltrate our congregations by planting strange teachers who teach strange things which result in strange gospels that deceive many.

Paul had left Timothy in Ephesus to oppose Satan's work to deceive and to cause disorder in the church.

In chapter 3, verse 14, Paul explains his purpose for writing this letter to Timothy. There he says, I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.

Satan has always attacked the truth of God's word with the question, did God actually say? And with the deception, you will be like God to destroy people.

[9 : 44] He seeks to create disorder and disruption, especially in the church. That's his scheme. And he's relentless in his efforts to accomplish it.

In chapter 1, verses 3 through 11, Paul issued a warning to Timothy to be on guard against strange teachers teaching strange doctrines that result in strange gospels which do not save people, but deceive people.

In verses 12 through 17, where we were last week, Paul gives his testimony to the true gospel, the gospel of Jesus Christ, who is gracious and merciful to save sinners, transforming them from

Satan's kingdom of darkness and death to Christ's kingdom of light and life.

And in our text today, Paul commands Timothy to engage in this battle and to wage the good warfare. Paul gives this command specifically to Timothy here, but as we'll see as we look at some other scriptures today, this is a command that the Lord gives to all whom he's been gracious to save.

Here's the command is the main idea for this morning's sermon. Christians must wage the good warfare. Christians must wage the good warfare. You have been saved by Christ.

[11:09] You have been enlisted in his army to fight the good fight. In Paul's second letter to Timothy, he reinforced this reality to him in 2 Timothy 2, 3 through 4, share in sufferings as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. Now you might think, or you could be thinking, well, Timothy was a pastor and the fight primarily belonged to him or to leaders like him in the church.

Timothy was pastoring the church in Ephesus, but about two years before writing this letter to Timothy, Paul wrote a letter to the Christians in Ephesus where Timothy was pastoring.

And in chapter 6, verses 10 through 12, he says to them, finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

[12:26] Paul then goes on in that passage to describe the spiritual armor that Christians are to put on as they wage the good warfare. All this to say that if you are a Christian, you are commanded by the Lord to wage the good warfare.

If the Lord has saved you, he's commanded you to fulfill his mission, to go and to make disciples and to disciple disciples, to teach them the truth that he has entrusted us with.

Satan vehemently opposes this mission. He has declared war on God and he has declared war on you.

You don't have an option. As a Christian, you don't have an option to sit this one out. You are engaged in the conflict and you must always be on your guard.

You must always be engaged in the battle. In 1 Peter 5, verses 8 through 9, Christians are warned by the apostle. He says, Be sober-minded.

[13:41] Be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. Resist him. Firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of sufferings are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

Satan cannot take away your salvation, but he can rob you of the joy and confidence of your salvation by bombarding you with temptations, persecutions, and discouragements.

Now, I know that this has been a lengthy introduction to this sermon and that's because of how important this subject is. Our church has grown.

Our church is not perfect. No church is perfect. This side of heaven. This side of glory. But it's healthy, I would say. And Satan hates healthy churches.

And so I hope this sermon will encourage you to obey our Lord's command to wage the good warfare. If you're an unbeliever this morning, we are so glad that you are here.

[14:57] God has brought you here to hear this sermon, to hear his gospel. And I hope that it will take root in your heart and that you will be saved by him from your sins.

Jesus talked about the gospel. He compared it to seeds that are thrown and some of the gospel seed falls on the hard path which the birds snatch up and they eat before it can take root.

That's Satan's objective for you. He doesn't want you to be saved. He doesn't want you to believe. He wants you to stay blind.

He wants your heart to stay hard. He wants to keep you in bondage. to sin. He wants to destroy you. And I pray that today as we look at this command for Christians to wage the good warfare that Christ will save you and that he will enlist you in his army that you will be on the winning side of this war.

And so there's three questions that we'll ask as we look through this text to help Christians understand how we wage or what is the good warfare. The first question is that.

[16:14] What is the good warfare? Verse 18. First of all, let me say that wars as we understand them are a series of battles and they're fought on different fronts and on different terrains.

And this is true of Christian warfare. The Bible says that Satan attacks the minds of unbelievers in 2 Corinthians 4, 3 through 4. He speaks about Satan's efforts to blind the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the glory of Christ.

Satan attacks believers by seeking to discredit their witness and to test their faith. Remember, Jesus warned Peter in Luke chapter 22 verses 31 through 32.

Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. Another front, another battle where Satan attacks is marriages.

He drove a wedge between Adam and Eve by challenging them in the garden whether or not they could trust God. Satan attacks the church by targeting leaders and enticing them to fall into disgrace.

[17:27] This is why as we'll see as we get into chapter 3 of 1 Timothy there's a list of qualifications for elders. One of those in verse 7 is that moreover he must be well thought of by outsiders so that he might not fall into disgrace into a snare of the devil.

And as I've already mentioned he attacks the church by infiltrating it with false teachers which is the specific battle our passage addresses today.

In verse 18 again Paul says this charge I entrust you Timothy my child in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you that by them you may wage the good warfare.

In verse 18 Paul reminds Timothy of the charge that he had given him in verse 3. Chapter 1 verse 3 he says I urged you when I was going to Macedonia remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine.

The Greek word translated as charge is peregelson and this is a command given by someone in authority. If you've spent time in the military you know that when a commanding officer says to you that's an order that there's no negotiating.

[18:44] You do it or you get in big trouble. There was big trouble for the church in Ephesus if Timothy did not obey this order and as we'll see in this letter as we go through it verse by verse and as you go into 2 Timothy Paul was persistent in this same encouragement to him.

In 2 Timothy 1 6-7 Paul gives Timothy this encouragement for this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self control.

While all Christians are commanded to wage the good warfare it is the duty of the elders the shepherds to keep watch over the sheep and deny entrance to anyone or anything that would harm them.

The Lord had called Timothy to be in the ministry. He had confirmed that calling through other Christians. These were the prophecies previously made about him that Paul mentions.

Paul is reminding Timothy of these things to encourage him to support him to give him confidence to engage in the battle for the church in Ephesus to confront false teachers and their teachings which threaten the health and the unity of that congregation.

[20:14] Some people like confrontation but us normal people don't. For most of us confrontation does not give us warm tingly feelings in our stomach.

It gives us anxiety. It frustrates us with the thought if people would just act right we wouldn't have to have this confrontation.

Maybe Timothy had those feelings maybe not but regardless of how he felt this was an order that he had to obey. To not speak up to not challenge these false teachers would be to abandon his post to abandon his sheep.

Confronting these men wasn't being mean it was Timothy being obedient. Years ago back in my church in Leavenworth I preached a sermon and our text was on false teachers and it named names and so I named some names of some modern day false teachers and one of those names was Joel Osteen.

I didn't say anything mean about him I just pointed out that his gospel was a different gospel and it wasn't the truth it didn't match scripture. That week I had a lady in my office and she said to me Joel Osteen is a nice man he loves his wife and his church you shouldn't have said such mean things

about him and I told her Joel Osteen is not a nice man he may look nice he may act nice but what he is teaching isn't nice he is teaching a different gospel that is deceiving a lot of people and he's profited immensely off of that as a result and so friend I say to you sincerely and with love there are a lot of false teachers today there have always been false teachers there will always be false teachers until our Lord comes back there's a lot of them whether they are on TBN or the host of a YouTube channel there are a lot of people being used by Satan to deceive many they may seem nice they may look nice they may sound nice but don't be fooled if what they preach if what they teach doesn't match what God's word says they are being used by Satan to deceive you [22 : 48] Paul warned the Galatians about false teachers who distort the gospel in chapter 1 verse 8 look at what he says to them but even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preach to you let him be accursed these teachers may look and sound even like angelic beings messengers of light but in reality the Bible tells us they are inspired by Satan Paul will talk about this in 1st Timothy chapter 4 verses 1 through 2 now the spirit expressly says that in later times friends these are the later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared so what is the good warfare?

in in this this case it is confronting and defending the church against Satan's assaults to corrupt it and to create disorder by deceiving people tempting them to exchange the truth of God revealed in his word for lies that Satan tells Timothy's duty was to wage this war he was to enlist others in this fight and as we've seen all Christians are enlisted by Christ to engage in this battle so I hope you're convinced of that so now the question is how how must Christians wage the good warfare in the beginning of verse 19 Paul tells us holding faith and a good conscience Paul links faith and a good conscience twice in this letter the faith that he speaks of here is a reference to the Christian faith the gospel the word of God the Greek word translated as holding was used to denote possession having a firm grasp on something in football a receiver must have both feet and bounds in the NFL and have the ball firmly in his hands without it moving around for it to be considered a catch for him to be considered in possession of the ball Dallas Cowboys fans know how important this rule is or are frustrated by this rule because back in 2014 Dez Bryant made what appeared to be a potential game winning catch in the playoffs but upon further review the referees determined that he didn't have possession of the ball because it was moving around in his hands and in his arms as he hit the ground if you're a Cowboys fan I'm sorry to bring that up this morning but it serves the point of the kind of possession that Paul is talking about here this is not a holding on for dear life this is not like a person who falls from a cliff and is holding on to a branch for life this is a firm incontestable possession there needs to be no further review in

Timothy's case this was a firm grasp an unwavering devotion to God to Christ and his word this meant that Timothy was to train himself and to be a disciplined student of God's word as we read in chapter 4 verse 6 if you put these things before the brothers you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed Timothy was not just to train himself on this word he was to preach this word as we read in chapter 4 verse 13 until I come devote yourself to the public reading of scripture to exhortation to teaching not only was Timothy to train himself on this word and to teach and preach this word but he was to guard this word as we read in chapter 6 verse 20 years ago seven years ago when we first came to Bartlesville I think Dr. Piper invited us to Oklahoma Wesleyan University to hear Abdu Murray give his testimony Abdu Murray is a Christian apologist and he is a Christian who converted from Islam and he talked to us about his salvation and how it began with him as a Muslim debating Christians and in preparation for his debates he would read the Bible and he observed as an unbelieving Muslim that he knew more about the Bible than Christians he debated thankfully God saved him through reading his word and I share that story with you this morning because a lot of Christians are going to war with unsharpened blades and unloaded weapons because they aren't disciplined to study God's word they don't know if a verse is being taken out of context they don't know if what they are hearing is matching what

[28 : 08] God's word says because they just haven't spent time reading it or studying it or meditating on it Brian Chappell said what you know and believe about God is everything because what you know and believe about God will determine how you live doctrine determines!

Right doctrine makes it possible to wage the good warfare! Now I don't want to discourage you I don't want to beat you up I want to encourage you when I went to seminary I don't think I even knew

how many books in the Bible there were I would hear theological terms being used in class that I had never heard before and I would nod my head as if I did but I would write those words in the margins of my notepaper and I would go to the computer lab after class and I would look them up to find but that's not the case and so for me what helped is I learned to do I learned to read one book of the Bible this was something that John MacArthur had recommended to read 1st John which is five chapters and just read it every day those five chapters for a month and after you've read it for a month you have a pretty good grasp of what 1st

John says and then you move on to another book and you do the same thing you read a handful of chapters and you read those chapters consistently throughout a month and before you know it you have a pretty good grasp of what those verses mean and it takes time and friends you have the time you have more time than you think you just need to be disciplined!

and you need to be devoted God designed our bodies with special pain receptors nerve endings that release chemicals called neurotransmitters which sends a message to our brain signaling that something is wrong the conscience is to the soul what the pain receptors are to the body when we sin we feel guilt and shame and regret and fear and doubt insecurity and despair these feelings are warnings from our conscience that something is threatening the well being of our souls God doesn't just want us to know his word he wants us to obey his word because obeying his word keeps us safe from sin and its consequences Paul was empowered by a good conscience he stood courageously before the Sanhedrin in

Acts chapter 23 verse 1 it says and looking intently! at the council staring them in the eyes these men who hated Christ and who hated the gospel he said brothers I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day later in chapter 24 verse 16 Paul stands confidently before governor Felix and he declares so I always took pains to have a clear conscience towards both men and God remember Ephesians 6 12 that our war isn't!

[31 : 25] flesh and blood but the evil powers behind their deception our mission isn't to attack people physically or personally our mission is to share the gospel with them to counter and challenge their false beliefs with the truth in the hopes that they will be shared and they will share in Christ's victory in this war that they would be saved that they would share in Christ's victory and so I ask you are you holding the faith in this way do you have a good conscience are you prepared for battle if so you'll know the truth and the truth is something that you will live in and you'll have your targets lined up squarely on the true enemy where they need to be so now the third question why why must

Christians wage the good warfare why well I think we've already answered that question hopefully but there's another aspect of this question that we need to consider let's look at the rest of verses 19 through 20 by rejecting this Paul said some have made shipwreck of their faith among whom are

him and! Alexander whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme him and Alexander were possibly I think it's kind of likely that they were elders in the church at Ephesus but they had rejected the warning signs of their conscience their conscience was seared John Calvin said a bad conscience is the mother of all heresies where in the English it says it made shipwreck of their faith a literal translation is they made shipwreck of the faith the doctrine of these men was on the rocks in 2nd Timothy Paul mentions how Hymenaeus swerved from the truth in chapter 2 verses 16 through 18 there he urges them avoid irreverent babble for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness and their talk will spread like gangrene among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus who have swerved from so what

I want you to see here what we need to understand here is that many people say they believe in Jesus but what they believe about Jesus must match what God has said about Jesus in his word if it doesn't match the Jesus they believe in is not the true Jesus it is a Jesus it is a God that they've created in their own image in their own minds in their own hearts why must Christians wage the good warfare because stuff like this continues to happen and will continue to happen again until our Lord returns and until that time we are commanded to wage the good warfare like Paul we should name names was to discipline discipline him and

Alexander but we can and we should be careful of the materials that we use in our church we must be discerning who is this person what is this teaching we must look at all of those things and make sure that what we are bringing in isn't something that is going to be used by Satan to harm our church we should engage such people with the truth we should write books we should preach

sermons we should post things online we should as Christians enter into debates with those who believe these false things and are being used by Satan to spread deception we should engage them in conversation we should pray for them we should warn them and we should guard our church from their influence we speak the truth in love and we do this confidently because we know the truth of

[36 : 52] Christ and so how should we adjust our lives according to what we've read engage in the war knowing Christ has won again Christian you're in it whether you would want to be or not you're in it so engage engage be in God's word study it meditate over it ask questions about it engage with those who don't believe or believe different things don't attack them personally because again they're not the true enemy we want them to be saved the true enemy is Satan in the thought the deception behind what they believe that's what we attack that's what we engage by asking questions by pointing them to scripture is that what the Bible says or not we engage by putting on the full armor of God we read about that in Ephesians chapter 6 verses 10 through 18 I encourage you to go look at that and do that every day every day we're dressed for battle that is how we engage and as an unbeliever you've heard the gospel you know that you are a part of this war and Satan wants to have you he wants to keep you in the darkness he wants to keep you in your sin because he knows that the end of that path is destruction and he wants to continue to deliver you and think that you're basically a good enough person the Bible says that none of us is good none of us measures up to Christ to God's perfect standard and thus we needed Christ if we were going to be saved the only way that we could be saved was for God to send his only son to live the sinless life that we could never live to die on the cross for the sins that we committed against God and to rise again on the third day victorious over the enemies that we could never defeat what do you need to do to be saved you don't need to do anything but turn to the Lord and ask to be saved you don't need to go on some kind of pilgrimage you don't need to have a certain amount of scripture memorized you turn to the Lord you call out to him save me and he will and so

I encourage you to do that today be a part of the winning side be a part of the side of truth be a part of the side of life be a part of the side that is going to heaven and will live with the Lord forever without sin be on the side of Christ because he's won and he's going to win and there's no doubt about that and he invites you to enlist in his army I encourage you to do that today let's pray heavenly father we read your word and we know that the world is not just stuff it's not just the things that we see Lord there is a spiritual war that is being waged and has been waged from almost the time and Lord we're a part of it whether we would want to admit it or not Jesus you have saved us and in saving us you have given us life you have forgiven us completely and totally of our sins you have prepared a place for us with you in heaven but you've also given us a mission you've enlisted us to be your soldiers you've enlisted us to go and to make you've told us Lord and you've lived the example of how we are to do that to not just huddle in our churches and think that we're okay and just wait for you to return but to be active to be on the offense to go out to proclaim to defend to ask questions of those who don't believe of their beliefs and to challenge those things in the hopes Lord that be both active in the offensive ways that we should as your people but also be on the defense guarding our own hearts our own minds from deception guarding our church from the ways that Satan would like to influence us in ways to disrupt what you are doing here so God help us to understand the conflict help us Lord to engage in the battle in the right way and God we pray that as we do that you would be pleased that you would be glorified that the kingdom of

Jesus Christ would advance we ask these things in his name amen