

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Twenty-Second Sunday After Trinity, November 8, 2020

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 446, 501:1, 447, 444, 449.

Lessons: Jeremiah 23:16-30, Ephesians 6:10-18, Matthew 10:1-20.

Sermon Text: 1 Timothy 1:18-20

. Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

In the first chapter of Paul's first letter to Timothy, he warned against false teachers and told of the proper use of the Law. He thanked God who had redeemed him, the worst of sinners, emphasizing the ***"trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."*** 1 Timothy 1:15 (NIV2011)

Paul goes on: ***"Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience."***

Paul encourages Timothy to ***"Fight the good fight."*** But remember that

YOU, TOO, MUST "FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT."

- 1. It is a daily battle.**
- 2. Our enemies are powerful, but**
- 3. God promises more powerful weapons.**
- 4. Paul gives us a stern warning about fighting the good fight.**

The world is not friendly to the Gospel. Timothy was to do battle, fighting a good fight. Paul again is impressing on Timothy the importance of the instruction he is receiving, instructions to fight false teachers and to make sure that only the true Gospel of grace in Christ is taught.

In chapter four, Paul tells Timothy: ***"devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you. Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers."*** 1 Timothy 4:13-16 (NIV) In Ephesus there were false teachers whom Timothy must oppose without compromise.

What do you need to fight a battle, to ***"fight the good fight"***? Paul speaks of the weapons, both defensive and offensive in our Epistle lesson. He tells us: ***"put on the full armor of God, Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests."*** Ephesians 6:13-18 (NIV)

Paul wrote these words to the Christians in Ephesus, a place where Timothy was well known, for he was instructed to stay in Ephesus to preach and teach and command no one to teach any false doctrines. He even repeats the words ***"fight the good fight"*** in the last chapter of this letter (6:12).

The Christian is engaged in a war ***"not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."*** Ephesians 6:12 (NIV)

When we talk about war against these enemies, it is true that Jesus Christ conquered sin, death, and the power of the devil. The devil, Satan, is real, but he has lost his ultimate power. Whoever believes in Jesus Christ and what he did for all mankind will receive the final victory, the crown, the prize of victory in heaven, everlasting life in the glory of God's presence.

But until we get to heaven, we are constantly being attacked by Satan and his allies and even by our own flesh.

Peter's first letter warns us against Satan in these words: ***"Be self-controlled and alert. [Be sober, be vigilant]"*** (KJV) ***Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."*** 1 Peter 5:8 (NIV) Satan wants more people to keep him company in hell. And he will do anything to trap more people to share his damnation in hell.

Because he is ***"a liar and the father of lies."*** John 8:44 (NIV) Satan continues to present lies and half-truths, just like he tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden. That half-truth, and every half-truth is really a lie, was that when you eat the forbidden fruit, she would be like God knowing good and evil. Until then, she had known only good. Beware of Satan and his temptations!

We are also constantly being attacked by our sinful flesh. We have the struggle within ourselves of the New Man fighting with the Old Adam. This has been illustrated even in cartoon form of the angel on one shoulder and a picture of a devil on the other shoulder. Paul speaks of it this way in Romans: ***"What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin."*** Romans 7:24-25 (NIV)

In addition we are constantly being attacked by people in the sinful world. These attacks may not always be bold, obvious, attacks, but they exist and they are real and they are constant. They are sometimes subtle and we may not always be aware of them. We are often immersed in the attacks from the world. I think of the fable of the frog who found a nice, warm pan of water and enjoyed the warm water until he realized the water was boiling and it was too late to escape death. That's just one example of how the ideas and values of the wicked world find their way into our beings. These influences may come from acquaintances, coworkers, neighbors, and even supposed "friends". These influences are from television, movies, education, social media, radio and other sources such as music, news, and science. They include attacks both subtle and bold and obvious. They include mockery of our faith and our God and include all the ways the people of the world can lead us away from Jesus Christ and away from the Word of God.

So we are always involved in a fight, even sitting here in church. Satan wants to distract us and place evil thoughts in our minds and hearts, even evil thoughts about the people in the next pew. So we must constantly fight the evil that threatens to engulf us.

What does it mean to fight the good fight? We might say 'put up a good fight'.

Just because Christ has won the final victory over his enemies and our enemies doesn't mean that we can sit back and put our feet up. We can't lay down on the job of fighting a good fight. No warrior can. And we are Christ's warriors. Paul tells us how to fight the good fight. We must continue ***"holding on to faith and a good conscience."***

First of all we must hold on to the faith. Every Christian must have faith, faith in his Redeemer, faith in the doctrines of Christianity as divine truth. Without faith, the battle is lost. The follower of Christ must continue to trust and cling firmly to the full truth of the Gospel as God has revealed it to us in his Word.

At the same time a good conscience is necessary, not a conscience growing out of self-righteousness, but one that controls the entire conduct of the believer in agreement with the will of God. We must hold on to a good conscience. When we are faithful to the truth, our conscience will be formed and guided by God's Word. The voice of such a conscience will help to guide us, but it is important that the conscience is guided by God's Word of truth.

Faith and a good conscience go hand in hand. Without these the battle is lost. Timothy – and we – must continue to trust and to cling firmly to the full truth of the Gospel as God has revealed it in the Bible. From infancy Timothy had learned the Word of truth. He had learned well from Paul, and now he needs to carry on his work with a good conscience. This will happen when he is faithful to the truth he firmly believes. We must

remain firm in what we have been taught and learned from God's Word. A conscience not guided by any vice or sin will help preserve us sound in the faith.

When Paul tells Timothy about the qualities demanded of leaders in the church he writes: ***"They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience."*** 1 Timothy 3:9 (NIV)

When we hold to the faith, the law of God becomes a guideline and when we strive to obey and live by the Law of God, we will have a good conscience.

Paul himself tried to keep a clear conscience before God and men. When on trial for his faith, he said ***"I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man."*** Acts 24:16 (NIV)

If and when you don't fight the good fight, when you reject faith and a good conscience, you will shipwreck your faith. Those who set aside a good conscience will soon make a shipwreck of faith. Paul knew from experience how dangerous a shipwreck was.

Whoever knows what is right and fails to follow it, whoever knows the truth but fails to live it and contend for it, whoever refuses to listen to his conscience will suffer shipwreck in his faith.

The seriousness and importance of what Paul is telling Timothy by saying ***"fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience"*** is shown by the example he now gives, ***"Some have rejected [faith and a good conscience] and so have shipwrecked their faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme."***

Paul names two men whose terrible example should act as a deterrent to all lukewarm Christians. Among those who have succumbed to Satan are Hymenaeus and Alexander. The case of these two men was known to Timothy, both of them having become manifest as men who had denied the faith and a good conscience. So Paul with the Christian congregation had been obliged to deal harshly with these two men by declaring them to be citizens in the kingdom of Satan. But he did not want to be understood as though he had definitely shut out these men from the hope of salvation. It is true that if they would not repent and return to the truth, they would be lost forever. Exclusion from the Christian congregation was intended as an extreme measure of love. Having lost the blessed privileges of fellowship with the church, the two men might be brought to see the seriousness of their offense in making light of the great blessings of God. So we see that the primary reason of the greatest discipline even in the early Church was to reclaim the sinner. This serves as an example and warning for all confessors of Christ. One of these men is mentioned again in Paul's second letter to Timothy, where there is no indication of the man's repentance. Both of the men were dangerous false teachers.

Hymenaeus and Alexander had, at one time, made a profession but abandoned it, rejected it. They were delivered to Satan so as to not contradict or revile the doctrine of Christ and the ways of the Lord. This was also done to fight their leading others away from God and his salvation.

The goal of this was to reclaim the sinner. Paul wrote about a plainly impenitent sinner in First Corinthians: ***"When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord."*** 1 Corinthians 5:4-5 (NIV)

Those who have done what these men did beat down their conscience instead of beating down their sinful flesh. In chapter four, Paul tells Timothy: ***"The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron."*** 1 Timothy 4:1-2 (NIV)

Unless faith and a good conscience are a daily part of the life of every Christian, he or she will experience shipwreck. The word shipwreck signifies a deliberate, malicious rejection of the Word of God, of faith and a good conscience, resulting in eternal disaster for the soul. Shipwreck means destruction.

All Christians must fight this good fight diligently and courageously, even against oppositions and discouragements.

This is a daily battle, but never forget that God gives us the weapons.

Lord, preserve us as you give us the tools and weapons to fight the good fight! Amen.