

"Words for Pastor and People" (Part 3)

I'm continuing this preaching/teaching series of sermons from 1st Timothy. The Apostle Paul is giving instructions to the young pastor Timothy on how to lead the church and how to deal with issues that come up in the church.

1 Timothy 1:18 says this: "I am giving you these instructions, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies made earlier about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight." Notice, "in accordance with the prophecies made earlier about you...". Prophecy is one of the gifts of the Spirit. In the early church, people in the worship services would be moved by the Spirit to "prophecy" – to share a message from God. At some point someone prophesied something about Timothy. Paul urges Timothy to remember that prophecy, and to fulfill it by "fighting the good fight" or "waging the good warfare". It's battle language!

Christians can sometimes forget that we are engaged in spiritual warfare! The Christian life is not a peaceful vacation, lounging on the beach or on the deck of a cruise ship – it's *being engaged in a war!* A lifelong battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil! In Ephesians 6 it says we're not wrestling against flesh and blood, but against the cosmic powers of darkness, the spiritual forces of wickedness! It's a long-term battle against evil *outside* of us and evil *inside* of us! Being a real follower of Jesus, and living that life of discipleship, is going to set us in at some points against the ways of the world!

Note that Paul says to Timothy, "Fight the *good* fight". The Greek word for good is "kalos" – that word means good in the sense of being *winsome, lovely*. Even when we're doing battle as a Christian, it isn't a grim, miserable kind of thing! We ought to have the joy of the Lord in us, a certain winsomeness about us, because we're not fighting the battle against evil alone: Christ is our Commander!

Let's move on. 1 Timothy 1:18-19 says this: "This charge I commit to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies made earlier about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, having faith and a good conscience. By rejecting conscience, certain persons have suffered shipwreck in the faith."

Timothy is to fight the good fight holding on to 2 things: *faith, and a good conscience*. Faith: Don't let go of your faith, no matter how hard the battles of life are! When we're trying to live as a Christian, trying to steer away from evil, we can get discouraged. When we're dealing with bad things that happen to us, our faith can be tested. How often I've prayed for people, that they won't lose their faith, or give up on the Lord. As I was at this point typing the sermon, I noticed a Facebook posting of a friend, going through a rough time. She posted: "Lord, I don't need any more testing or growth. Haha, I'm good!"

Paul says, "Timothy, fight the good fight, *and hold on to your faith!*" And also, hold on to your *good conscience*. Conscience is that little voice within us that tells us something is wrong. Paul mentions two men who had rejected the voice of their conscience and made a shipwreck of their lives – *Hymenaeus and Alexander*.

What did they do? Hymenaeus is mentioned again in 2 Timothy. "Avoid profane chatter, for it will lead people into more and more impiety, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying resurrection has already occurred. They are upsetting the faith of some" (2 Timothy 2:16-18). He was guilty of "profane chatter" – upsetting people's faith by teaching things that weren't true. Alexander might be the Alexander mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:14-15: "Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will pay him back for his deeds. You also must beware of him, for he strongly opposed our message." Here are two Christian men who had fallen away from the faith by violating their conscience. They made a shipwreck of their lives, and the lives of others.

Maybe you know of people who have gone against their conscience – done what they know is wrong – to the point where they've turned from their faith, and brought grief upon themselves and others. Bible teacher and pastor Ray Stedman tells of a young man who helped draw up the plans for their church building. He and his wife, a vigorous young Christian couple, joined that church. He was raised on the mission field, son of missionary parents. He was a pilot. Ray flew with him several times, and really got to know him well. He was growing in his faith. He went on to theological seminary, then taught in a Bible school. But then something happened – he turned from what God wanted him to do. Soon afterwards he dropped out of his teaching position. After a bit his marriage broke up. At the present time he was living in the Sierra Nevadas, teaching school. On his third marriage. He had come to totally deny his Christian faith, claiming to be an atheist. He made a shipwreck not only of his own life, but of his family's, and others, too.

This isn't to focus on the negative, but these things happen. And Paul cautions Timothy to fight the good fight, and hold on to his faith, and pay heed to the conscience God has placed within us.

How did Paul respond to these men and what they did? Verse 20 tells us: "Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have turned over to Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme." What does that mean, "I have turned over to Satan"? We can't be sure. It could mean they were shunned, or excommunicated from the church. It could mean Paul prayed that Satan would bring some kind of physical suffering upon them to bring them to their senses. (Paul does a similar thing in the church in Corinth, where a man was living with his father's wife – probably the guy's stepmother. Paul delivers that man to Satan "for the destruction of the flesh" that his spirit may be saved).

Now, most of us today would say this is harsh treatment, much too drastic discipline. It's being judgmental. We even hear of awful cases of "shunning" here in Lancaster County. But here's the thing: First of all, this was done out of love and concern, in order to bring these men back to God, and to spiritual health. Paul's intention is *recovery, restoration, redemption*. Secondly, although this may seem extreme, *doing nothing* to try to restore people who have fallen away from God is worse! It often shows we don't care.

The Book of James closes with these interesting words: "My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and is brought back by another, you should know that

whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner's soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins" (James 5:19-20). The Christlike response, when a believer wanders away from God and makes a shipwreck of their lives, is to – in love – try to restore that person spiritually!

I want to finish today's message by looking at 1 Timothy 2:1-7 as a unit. Let's look at 1 Timothy 2:1-4. "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. This is right and acceptable before God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

The emphasis now turns to *prayer* in the church: the church is to lift up prayers *for all people*. Four different words for prayer are used. Supplications – this means requests made out of a sense of need. Prayers – a general word for our coming to God in prayer. Intercessions – these are prayers for other people's needs. Thanksgivings – prayers of thanks.

The church is to be in prayer for people! This makes me reflect again on the place of prayer here at Community UMC. Is prayer central to our life as a congregation? How important is prayer in our worship? Is it just a routine part of worship where little or no thought is given to who we want to pray for, or what we want to say to God? It's my responsibility - as your pastor - to provide leadership in this area! What a tremendous opportunity we have each week to *pray together*, to pray for one another, to intercede on behalf of friends, neighbors, our nation, the world, and to lift up prayers of thanks to God!

Notice, in praying *for everyone*, we are to include prayers *"for kings and all who are in high positions"* (verse 2). We don't have many "kings" today – but we do have governmental leaders that we should be praying for. There are others in positions of authority. Think of those men and women who sit on the boards of large corporations, who make decisions that affect the nation's economy, or whose decisions affect the families of thousands of workers. Think of those who are heads of corporate media – Comcast, Disney - who control the newscasts, the TV entertainment programs, or portions of the internet. We ought to be praying for these influential leaders!

When Paul wrote these words to lift up kings in prayer most Christians lived under the heavy hand of Roman emperors and Roman authority. (I shouldn't need to tell you that these rulers persecuted Christians). Yet Paul says those in the church were to pray for them! I have to be honest and tell you I find it very difficult to pray for some of our political leaders! (I'm not going to tell you who I have trouble praying for!). If you're a Democrat, are you praying for Donald Trump, or the Speaker of the House, Mike Johnson (who's a Christian by the way)? If you're a Republican, are you praying for Joe Biden, Kamala Harris, Chuck Schumer? It's hard, isn't it!

A man named Doug Adams collects prayers made on behalf of politicians. These prayers include the following. A famous preacher named Lyman Beecher prayed: "O Lord, grant that we may

not despise our rulers; and grant, O Lord, that they may not act so we can't help it."

Samuel Eaton, a Congregationalist who disliked James Madison's foreign policy, prayed, "Lord, Thou hast commanded us to pray for our enemies, we would therefore pray for the President and Vice-President of these United States." Henry Ward Beecher, after President James Buchanan was out of office, prayed, "Thank you, Lord, for removing rulers, imbecile in all but corruption."

Why are we to pray for everyone? And for those in authority? "So that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity" (1 Timothy 2:2b). When we pray for leaders to help bring about peace and order, isn't there more of a chance that people can live in godliness and dignity, verses times of war, when people are focused on killing their enemies? Also, "This is right and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:3-4). Our prayers should always have in mind God's desire that all people be saved!

Chuck Colson, in his book *The Body*, wrote how it was the influence and prayers of the church in many countries that helped bring about the collapse of communism, and the breaking down of the Berlin Wall. For example, in East Germany, Monday evening prayer services at St. Nikolai's Church in Leipzig overflowed. 1500 people crowded into Leipzig's Evangelical Reformed Church on Monday evenings, though the building only seated 550. On October 9th, 1989, after the usual Monday night prayer meeting at the church, 150,000 people took to the streets shouting, "We are the people!"

Colson told the story of a little girl named Irina, who somehow came to faith in Christ even in Krushchev's Soviet Union. Taking a stand for Christ, she survived years of prison camps, hard labor, near starvation. Released in 1986, she eventually made her way to the West, and freedom.

After her release, she found out that thousands of Christians had been praying for her. She wrote about the effect of those prayers of the Church in one of her books called *Pencil Letters*.

"Believe me, it was often thus: In solitary cells, on winter nights
a sudden sense of joy and warmth And a resounding note of love.
And then, unsleeping, I would know A-huddle by an icy wall:
Someone is thinking of me now, Petitioning the Lord for me.
My dear ones, thank you all Who did not falter, who believed in us!
In the most fearful prison hour We probably would not have passed
Through everything – from end to end, Our heads held high, unbowed –
Without your valiant hearts To light our path.

Amazing things can happen when God's people take prayer seriously! Here again this admonition for us to pray: "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. This is right and acceptable before God our Savior" (1 Timothy 2:1-3).

