

# Fight the Good Fight

The Bible calls itself by a number of different names. Some of the more common names are the Scriptures, the Word of the Lord, and the Word of God. The term Word of the Lord reveals that the Lord wrote the Bible. That was the name the prophets frequently gave to the Scriptures. Another name is the Word of God. That name proclaims that God wrote the Bible.

A few of the less common names, which are among my favorites, are the Word of Righteousness, Word of Life, and the Word of Truth.

These names help us understand the character and purpose of the Bible. The Word of Life says the Bible is about eternal life or real life. The Word of Truth teaches us that the Bible is truthful and not myth or fiction. The Word of

Righteousness means the Bible helps us know how to live righteously. Another name is the Word of Christ. That says that the Bible contains the very words of our Christ who is God.

All these names describe this inspired book we are studying. It reveals our God and leads us to Christ. It reveals how to be forgiven for our sins and become as positionally or legally righteous as Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21). It tells us how we can go to heaven when we die, and it tells us how to live righteously. Those are some of the reasons the Bible is so important. Because the Bible is so very important, Paul urged Timothy and us to fight the good fight.

**INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY.** Our study is from 1 Timothy 1:18-20. Starting in verse 18, the apostle Paul com-

mands Timothy to fight the good fight. In verse 19, Timothy was given two principles for fighting the good fight. Then in verses 19-20 Paul gave Timothy an example of what happens when individuals fail to fight the good fight. Here is our passage,

**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, keeping faith and a good con-**

**science, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme. 1 Timothy 1:18-20 (NASB)**



**FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT (v 18-19A).** Verse 18 opens with a command to Timothy. When Paul calls Timothy a “son,” he was not implying that Timothy was his biological son but his spiritual son. This is clear from Acts 16:1-3 which teaches us that Paul had found Timothy in Ephesus and then called him to join Paul in the ministry. Timothy was a faithful partner in the ministry as evidenced in ten of Paul’s thirteen letters (Romans 16:21; 1 Corinthians 4:17; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1; 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; Philemon 1). So the term “son” was simply a term of endearment.

After calling Timothy “son,” Paul then commanded Timothy to fight the good fight “in accordance with the proph-

ecies previously made concerning” him. But notice that Paul does not describe the nature of the prophecies. He just says, “prophecies previously made concerning you.” We can thank the Lord for 1 Timothy 4:14 since it helps us understand that Paul was referring to a spiritual gift. 1 Timothy 4:14 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. 1 Timothy 4:14 (NASB)**

Also in 2 Timothy 1:6, Paul reminds Timothy to “kindle afresh the gift.” Notice that Paul refers to gift in the singular. He said,

**For this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. 2 Timothy 1:6 (NASB)**

I think these verses help us understand that “in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning” refers to a single spiritual gift. The plural just refers to a prophecy that was repeated on different occasions.

Now we must ask what type of spiritual gift was given to Timothy? While we are not told exactly in these three passages, I believe the context suggests that his spiritual gift was a combination of being a pastor and teaching. I think he had the spiritual gift of pastor-teacher (Ephesians 4:11). Then Paul and others laid hands on him according to 1 Timothy 4:14.

*Command to Fight the Good Fight (v. 18).* Now we are ready to understand Paul’s command to Timothy to fight the good fight. It occurs in the last part of verse 18.

**... by them you fight the good fight. 1 Timothy 1:18 (NASB)**

Paul says Timothy was to use “them.” That is, Timothy was to use this spiritual gift to fight the good fight. The Greek word for “fight” is *strateuo*. It is a military term referring to warfare against others. That means that to fight the good fight is warfare. It is a battle against demonic forces who influence false teachers. The next important word is “good.” In the Greek there are two different words for “good.” One word is *agathos*

and the other is *kalos*. *Agathos* has the sense of external goodness or good external behavior. *Kalos* is the second word and it had the sense of beauty. Later it had the sense of intrinsic goodness. Paul uses *kalos* when he says “good fight.” In other words, Paul said that the good fight is an intrinsically good fight. Not only was Timothy commanded to engage in this warfare, but it is the warfare of the highest good in which any Christian can engage. If you are looking for a cause that is of the highest good, then fight the good fight.

*Principle #1 — Keep The Faith (v. 19a).* But how do we engage in this good fight? Paul tells us in the first part of 1 Timothy 1:19a. He said,

**... keeping faith and a good conscience. 1 Timothy 1:19a (NASB)**

The good fight involves two very important principles. The two principles should be easy for us to remember: keeping faith and a good conscience. Now when Paul said “keeping faith,” I do not believe that he was referring to our own personal faith in Jesus Christ. I know some study Bibles imply that the “faith” refers to one’s personal faith in Christ or God. But we will discover soon in the last part of verse 19 that Paul’s example of two men who were shipwrecked, were shipwrecked in regards to the content of the faith or the Scriptures. That is why I opened our study by reminding everyone about the Word of God, the Word of Christ, the Word of Life, Word of Truth, and the Word of Righteousness. I wanted us to be thinking about the importance of the Bible. Paul’s point is that we fight the good fight by doing two things: 1) holding on to or keeping the objective content of the faith and 2) having a good conscience. Now let us discover these two principles. The first is, how do we hold on to the faith?

1) *Be A Christian.* In order to do this, we must do five things. The first thing we must do is to be a Christian. Paul reveals this in 2 Timothy 3:15 when he says that by reading the Scriptures, Timothy was given the wisdom that ultimately resulted in him being saved. That Scripture is powerful enough to help someone understand they are sinners and that Christ can forgive their sins. People have become believers by just reading the Bible. Hebrews 4:12 reveals the great power of Scripture. It says,

**For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Hebrews 4:12 (NASB)**

So, in order to keep the faith, a person must first be a warrior in the faith. He or she must first be a Christian.

2) *Read The Bible.* The second thing we must do to keep the faith is to read the Bible. Why do we need to regularly read the Bible and meditate on what we read? The answer is that if we do not know the Bible, we cannot keep it. Read 1 Peter 2:2-3. It commands us to read the Bible. It says,

**Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. 1 Peter 2:2-3 (NASB)**

The point is that not only do the Scriptures help an unbelieving sinner believe in Christ, but they also spiritually transform believers. Believers need to read the Bible and meditate on what we read! It is the most powerful book on planet earth.

The passage states that those who have been saved need to read and study the Bible so that they may grow in “respect to salvation.” Hebrews 5:11-14 reveals that the serious study of the Word of God is required if we desire to grow in “respect to salvation.” It says we need to know more than just the elementary truths of the Bible. Verses 13-14 say that as we know more about Scripture, we will be able to discern good from evil. We can become more righteous and more spiritually mature.

**For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. Hebrews 5:13-14 (NASB)**

Notice the connection between “solid food” and the ability to know good versus evil. The message is that knowledge of the Word of God is essential to becoming more righteous.

1 John 2:12-14 also teaches that knowledge of the Bible is important to our spiritual growth. By studying the Word of Truth, we are moving toward becoming a spiritual young man

in the faith and ultimately a spiritual father of the faith. The end goal is to know God the Father in a very deep way.

Now Timothy would have understood that Paul’s command to “keep the faith” would have included the reading of Scripture. He had been traveling with Paul. If he had not understood, he would have after he read 1 Timothy 4:13. It says,

**... give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching. 1 Timothy 4:13 (NASB)**

Reading the Bible is fundamental to our spiritual growth. Reading the Bible is not just for pastors or someone who has the spiritual gift of teaching. So, are you reading Scripture every day? Are you obeying this command?

3) *Study The Bible.* The third thing we must do to keep the faith is to seriously study the Bible. But how are we supposed to study the Bible? The answer is given to us in 2 Timothy 2:15. It says,

**Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15 (NASB)**

Paul’s first command is to “be diligent” to study the Bible. While this command was given to Timothy, it also applies to every believer. It describes what we must do to learn the Bible so that we can teach it. To be diligent implies work. To be a workman implies work. To “accurately handle the word of truth” implies great effort. That is, Bible study is more than listening to some preacher on the internet, a CD, the radio, or reading a book that someone wrote about the Bible. Bible study means a lot of serious study to understand it.

If our study is shallow, then our spiritual life will be shallow. We cannot become mature with a shallow understanding of Scripture. 1 Timothy 4:15 is a command to Timothy to seriously read, study and teach the Bible. It says,

**Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all. 1 Timothy 4:15 (NASB)**

4) *Teach The Bible.* This brings us to the fourth thing we must do to keep the faith. We must teach the Bible. Notice that Timothy was urged to teach the Bible in 1 Timothy 4:15. Also notice that every believer is to teach the Bible too! You might object at that statement. But what better way to help you learn the truth than to study it enough to be able to teach it to others? Listen to Hebrews 5:12. The Holy Spirit clearly tells every believer that he or she should be able to teach the Bible to others when it says,

**For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. Hebrews 5:12 (NASB)**

Now the Holy Spirit is not telling us that everyone should have the gift of teaching but that we should be able to at least explain the Bible to others. One may not be a very gifted teacher, but one should be able to at least explain the basic meaning of it.

Then in the last part of the verse, it says that the people to whom Hebrews was written had slipped backward in their spiritual life. That is, they had forgotten what they had been taught. They needed to be taught the elementary truths once more. What a sad statement! If a believer stops reading and studying the Bible, they slide backward in their spiritual life. We have a divine principle here. A believer is either moving forward or slipping backward spiritually. So, what are you doing? If you are not reading and studying the Bible, then you are slipping backward. I do not mean that you are listening to some preacher on the radio, internet, or television. The question is are you digging into the Word for yourself?

Now I do not mean that teachers and pastors are not important. Ephesians 4:11-14 tells us that God has given the church spiritually gifted men to teach us the Bible. Ephesians 4:11-13 says,

**And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure**

**of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. Ephesians 4:11-13 (NASB)**

So, the goal of teaching Scripture is to build up the body of Christ, to be united in faith, to know God, and become spiritually mature in Christ. Teaching Scripture accurately requires reading, serious study, and organization of thoughts.

5) *Defend The Bible.* The fifth thing believers must do to keep the faith is to defend the Bible. First, we must be a believer. Then we must read it, study it, and be able to teach it. All four steps are required before we can defend the faith. For example, in 1 Timothy 4:6 Paul will urge Timothy to nourish himself with the Word by reading and studying it. In 1 Timothy 4:13 and 2 Timothy 4:2, Paul urged Timothy to teach it. Then in 1 Timothy 6:20, Paul urged Timothy to guard or protect it. When we do all five things, we will grow spiritually first, and then others can also.

So, how do we defend or guard Scripture? Jude 3 says,

**Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. Jude 3 (NASB)**

The Greek word for “contend earnestly” has the idea of fighting. Then Jude 17 explains how to do this. We defend the faith by remembering the teachings of the apostles. We will remember the Scriptures by reading, studying, teaching, and defending it.

That is why the elders of the church must meet the qualifications in Titus 1:9. The verse says,

**... holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. Titus 1:9 (NASB)**

The only way to do this is by reading, studying, and teaching the faithful Word. That is the only way we can identify false teachers and false doctrine. If we find a false teacher in our church, we need to tell the pastor or a church leader. If he or she is on the internet, television, or some other place, we must

ignore them and not read or listen to them. That is the command from Christ to every believer in 2 John 9-10. So, we have discovered five ways to keep the faith. They comprise the first principle for fighting the good fight.

*Principle #2 — Good Conscience (verse 19a).* The second principle for fighting the good fight is to hold onto a good conscience. Notice the first part of verse 19 again. It says,

... holding faith and a good conscience. 1 Timothy 1:19a (NASB)

So, how does a believer have a good conscience? The answer is to live a godly life. The Greek word for “good” is not *kalos* this time, but *agathos*. *Agathos* refers to good external behavior or moral behavior. Paul connects good behavior with the conscience. Then our conscience will not condemn us and motivate us to twist the meaning of the Scriptures so that we feel good about ourselves. Then we do not feel guilty, embarrassed, or mourn our sins. We should not seek to minimize the meaning of Scripture to soothe our conscience. John MacArthur makes this very helpful comment,

A good conscience is the result of a pure life. Like Paul (cf. Acts 24:16), Timothy was to maintain a blameless conscience. Conscience is a God-given device in every human mind that reacts to that person’s behavior. It either accuses or excuses (Rom. 2:14-15). It produces feelings of well-being, peace, contentment, and calm when behavior is good. When behavior is evil, it activates guilt, shame, remorse, fear, doubt, insecurity, and despair. Its purpose is to warn the person of the fact that he is sinning. What a blessing to have such a warning device. It is to the soul what pain is to the body. Pain warns that something threatens the body’s well-being. Guilt warns that something threatens the well-being of the soul. Paul was always anxious to have a clean, clear, pure, good conscience (cf. 2 Cor. 1: 12) and desired the same for Timothy. He calls for holiness in this charge to Timothy.

Doctrinal purity must be accompanied by purity of life. There is an inseparable link between truth and morality, between right belief and right behavior. Consequently, theological error has its roots in moral rather than intellectual soil (cf. Matt. 7:15-20).

People often teach wrong doctrine to accommodate their sin.

That truth is borne out by the immorality that so often characterizes false teachers (cf. 2 Peter 2). It is not surprising, then, that Paul also emphasizes godliness in 1 Timothy (cf. 2:10; 4:7-8; 6:6)<sup>1</sup>.

So, a good conscience is essential for accurately understanding Scripture, and maintaining doctrinal purity. So are you committing some sin again and again? Is it a sin that is known only to you and God, or maybe your spouse and God? Is there some passage of Scripture you do not like to hear because it embarrasses you? You would rather it is not read and maybe you avoid it? The question is, “Do you have a good conscience?”

So, the second principle for fighting the good fight is to have a good conscience.

**THE EXAMPLE (v 19b-20).** Now we come to Paul’s illustration of two men who did not fight the good fight. Look for the two principles that we have just studied in 1 Timothy 1:19b-20.

... which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme. 1 Timothy 1:19b-20 (NASB)

Notice that Paul refers to some men who suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith. The NASB and some other Bibles say “their faith” at the end of verse 19. But that is not correct. The words “the faith” are in the singular in the Greek text. Most Bible scholars agree that “the faith” is in the singular and refers to the Scriptures — the content of faith. These two men were shipwrecked because they 1) did not hold to the faith and 2) have a good conscience.

Notice that Paul says these two men had sinned by blaspheming God. That is, they did not have a good conscience. Their sins are the reason they were shipwrecked in regard to the faith. It appears they thought it was okay to blaspheme the name of God. I wonder what Bible passage they used to justify their behavior? It is common for people to distort Scripture to justify their behavior. Do you see how very important it is for

1. John MacArthur. 1 Timothy. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary. Moody Press. 1995. p. 45.



a believer to have personal holiness and hold to the Scriptures? They go together! That is how we fight the good fight. Without the Word of God, we do not know how to have a good conscience, and without a good conscience we distort the Word of God.

So what did Paul do to these men? He says that he handed them over to Satan. It appears church discipline was exercised and they were removed from the church. They were not allowed to return until they stopped blaspheming God. The protection of the church would have been withdrawn and God's protection of them would have been removed (Matthew 18:19-20). Satan would have been able to get to them.

Paul does not tell us if they were believers or unbelievers. If they were unbelievers, then they were in serious trouble without the Holy Spirit indwelling them. But since Paul used them as an example for not fighting the good fight, it appears they were believers who did not have a good conscience and were distorting Scripture. They lost the first skirmish in the fight!

**CONCLUSION.** So, Timothy was urged to fight the good fight. Paul challenges Timothy to fight the good fight again in 1 Timothy 6:12. The final time Paul urged Timothy to fight the good fight was in 2 Timothy 4:7-8. Here is 2 Timothy 4:7-8,

*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing. 1 Timothy 4:7-8 (NASB)*

I pray that when I stand before God the Father, I will hear that I fought the good fight. I pray that for everyone who is a believer. May we please our God.