

Letters From My Father
Week 4
1 Timothy 1:18-20
"Spiritual Warfare"

Introduction

Finally, be strengthened by The LORD and by His vast strength. Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens. For this reason take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand.

Ephesians 6:10-13

I find it fascinating, but not in the least bit surprising, that the same church that Paul warned against idleness, when it comes to the matters of spiritual warfare (Ephesians circa A.D. 62), was the same church where he would later need to send Timothy to lead the charge against it. It was just a few short years after Paul penned his famous epistle to the church at Ephesus that he was compelled to send Timothy there to get the church back on track. Apparently, they had paid little heed to his warnings concerning the spiritual attacks that are bound to come against every congregation of true Believers. The biggest mistake that a church, or even an individual Christian, can make in their walk of faith is to believe that the forces of evil will somehow pass by them on the way to the battlefield.

Complacency is the enemy of every soldier on the battlefield. This is why every military on earth trains its soldiers to be both prepared and alert. In the case of Ephesus, it is clear that their lackadaisical approach to their defense of the faith had allowed the enemy to establish a beachhead within the walls of the church, as it were. And as a result, a young pastor named Timothy was sent to rally the troops and drive the enemy forces back into the abyss from whence they came.

I never ceased to be amazed when I see the surprised faces of those who are new to ministry when the attacks against them materialize! They often seem so very surprised that the enemy of our faith would actually "shoot" at them. For you see, most Christians today love to hear about grace, mercy, love, and forgiveness. They want everything that is said and done in the church to be positive and up-lifting. But in reality, in addition to all the goodness that accompanies our salvation, we must also be fully cognizant that as long as we live in this wicked world, we are at war with its wicked forces that are arrayed against us. We have an adversary, and this, we must never forget.

Be sober-minded, be alert. Your adversary the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour. Resist him, firm in the faith, knowing that the same kind of sufferings are being experienced by your fellow believers throughout the world.

1 Peter 5:8

So not only is spiritual warfare a reality, it is also a guarantee for every Believer. The good news is, even though we have an adversary, we also have an Advocate! And His Name is Christ Jesus. He will empower us, so that we may overcome each and every battle that we face. So take heart. If the devil is shooting at you, it means that you are doing something right. For the enemy will always direct his forces to attack the greatest threats to his objectives.

I once heard a pastor say, "If you are not meeting the devil head on every day, then it could be that you are both headed in the same direction." Sobering thought, but true nonetheless. If you are following Christ, then you must be prepared for the battle that is bound to ensue as a result. In Paul's letter to Timothy, he reminds him of this reality. So, as we finish up the first chapter of this insightful epistle, we see an example of **The Charge**, juxtaposed against the failure of **The Churched**. Please allow me to explain.

The Charge (vs.18-19)

Timothy, my son, I am giving you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies previously made about you, so that by recalling them you may fight the good fight, having faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and shipwrecked the faith. **1 Timothy 1:18-19**

Paul once again refers to Timothy as “my son” before he reminds him of what he has been sent to Ephesus to do. This must have been such a comfort to the young pastor to know just how fond his mentor was of him, and how much “prayer support” he was receiving for his endeavors. Paul may not have been with Timothy physically, but he was certainly cheering him on, and he was lifting him up in continual prayer.

I cannot tell you how encouraging it is in my ministry to hear people telling me that they are praying for me. There is a sense of courage that comes from knowing that people care enough to lift my name before the throne when they talk to The Savior! There can be no question as to whether or not Paul loved his **“true son in the faith”**. And therefore, Timothy would have known this great prayer warrior was in the trenches daily calling out to The Father on his behalf.

Paul then continued on to remind the young man of the reason that he had been dispatched to Ephesus. He was not there on vacation or to be a guest of honor at some religious festival. No, he had been dispatched there for active duty. As a soldier of Christ, Timothy had been sent to war. And just as every good soldier receives orders from his commanding officer, Timothy had been dispatched with **“instruction”**. The actual word that Paul uses is **“parangelia”** in the Greek, and it is better translated as a **“charge”** or a **“command”** from a superior officer. Paul was reminding Timothy of his duty as a soldier of Christ.

I have found that Christians today aren't very fond of the word “duty”. Apparently it has become as unfamiliar to some as the rotary telephone, the steam engine, or the cotton gin. Duty these days seems to be a relic of the past in this modern world of “what's in it for me-ism”. If a politician ran for office today and gave the speech that John Kennedy gave in 1961 which climaxed with the famous, **“Ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country”**, I'm not sure he would get a single vote. We simply do not believe in “duty” anymore. But for the Christian, there is most definitely an obligation to serve the One Who saved us.

I am reminded of the words of Christ, when he commanded His disciples that they must forgive those who trespass against them, no matter how many times they seek forgiveness (**Luke 17:1-4**). The disciples response was telling. In essence, they told the Savior that if He required that high degree of obedience, then He would need to “increase their faith”! His reply was amazing.

“Which one of you having a servant tending sheep or plowing will say to him when he comes in from the field ‘Come at once and sit down to eat’? Instead, will he not tell him, ‘Prepare something for me to eat, get ready, and serve me while I eat and drink; later you can eat and drink’? Does he thank that servant because he did what he was commanded? In the same way, when you have done all that you were commanded, you should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we’ve only done our duty.’” **Luke 17:7-10**

Make no mistake about what Jesus is saying in that passage. He told His disciples just as He tells us; we are expected to do our duty. No complaints, no demands upon our Commander in Chief, no conditions that first must be met in order to induce our obedience, we are simply commanded to obey. To sum up what Jesus was telling His followers when they complained about the difficulty of the tasks they had been assigned, the answer was simple: “Shut up and do your duty.” What a shock this is to the modern-day, spoiled rotten Believer! To be a Christian is to be a soldier. And soldiers don't go on camping trips, they go to war. And that my friends... is our duty.

After reminding Timothy of his charge, Paul went on to tell Timothy that he had been chosen by God for such a time as this. No doubt Timothy had received some type of ordination service, where men of the faith had laid hands over him and prophesied as to his duties as a minister of the Gospel. So there could be no question as to the responsibilities that had been assigned to him. Timothy was a soldier, because he had been enlisted by God Himself.

With his duty and mission made clear, Paul also exhorted his young ward to remember what he must do in order to win this battle that lay before him. If Timothy were to be victorious in this fight, he must maintain his faith as well as his integrity. For to fall away from either was to guarantee failure upon the battlefield. To survive spiritual warfare, a soldier of Christ must maintain a close and prayerful relationship with The Savior, through prayer and the devoted study of God's Word. Jesus called this relationship "Abiding in Him", and He told his disciples that unless they maintained this faithful relationship with Him throughout, they could never be effective.

"I Am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in Me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without Me." **John 15:5**

The second thing that Timothy would need to do is to keep himself morally pure, thereby maintaining a clean conscience. A preacher who is caught up in sin, cannot stand and preach with any effectiveness. All of us sin, but there is a difference between unintentional sin and ongoing willful disobedience. No pastor can preach with any real authority while his own conscience is condemning him. This is why sins must be confessed, turned away from, and forgiven. Otherwise, you are doomed to failure upon the battlefield. This truth applies to every Believer as well. You can't run with the devil and hope to defeat him at the same time. Holiness is a prerequisite for victoriousness.

The devil has many ways in which he will attempt to bring us down. The most common of which I would call the four "F's" of spiritual warfare. They are as follows, your "*Flesh*", "*Fatigue*", "*Fakers*", and "*False Doctrine*". These are all enemies of the faithful soldier. The first two seem to go hand in hand. For I have learned that the more weary I become, the more susceptible I am to my flesh. Weary soldiers are weak soldiers. And when we begin to listen to our own flesh, rather than the commands of our Commander-in-Chief, we are sure to fall. This is why the road to victory is littered with the corpses of fallen ministers. We are in a constant battle with our fleshly desires (***Romans 7***), and when we are led astray by them, we are no longer effective in the battle, and our conscience condemns us every time we try to stand firm against the devil's schemes.

I once heard it said of a minister, "He is such a good preacher, he should never get out of the pulpit. But he is such a bad Christian, he should never get in the pulpit!" Let these words never be said of us. Stay in close connection and holiness with Christ, and you will be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. This is what Paul meant when he spoke of the "Armor of God". And with whom did he share that valuable piece of information? Answer: The Church of Ephesus. Too bad they didn't listen!

The next two "F's" that the devil uses to destroy a church are "*fakers*" and "*false doctrine*". These also usually go hand in hand. For Satan will send his emissaries to infiltrate the church. These folks are sinners by nature, but disguise themselves as saints. And because they willfully submit to unrighteousness, they espouse false teachings in order to appease their own consciences. In other words, the portions of Scripture that should condemn them are merely disregarded.

False teachers treat the *Bible* as a buffet table. They keep the parts they like and discard the ones they do not. And then they sprinkle in a bit of secular humanistic psychology to fill in the gaps. What you get as a result is a false doctrine and false christ offering up a message that appeals to the "itching ears" of the wicked. The message is clear: "You are fine just the way that you are, and God accepts you. No need to repent, for God does not despise your sin." If this were true, then the cross would mean absolutely nothing! Such teaching is designed for one purpose only; to demolish the gospel of Christ much like a ship smashed against the rocks by the wind and waves.

And if this kind of blasphemy bothers you, then welcome to the battlefield, my fellow soldier!

The Churched (vs.20)

Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered to Satan, so that they may be taught not to blaspheme. **1 Timothy 1:20**

Paul had already begun to take steps to eradicate the false teachers, who had infiltrated the church at Ephesus. Two of the ring leaders were expelled from the fellowship. We know very little about these men, Hymenaeus and Alexander, other than they were false teachers that Paul dealt with personally. Paul would later bring up the names again in his second letter to his young protege.

We do know that Hymenaeus, along with another false teach, Philetus, had been teaching that the resurrection of the dead had already taken place (**2 Timothy 2:17-18**). We cannot know for sure the reason for this false teaching, but we do know of its results. These men had caused many to give up on the faith. And eventually, that is what all false teaching does. The devil will often send his own *apostles* into churches in order to shipwreck the faith of many. It is just what he does.

Paul stated that he had **“handed these men over to Satan.”** Many *Bible* teachers had debated the exact meaning of these words. I personally subscribe to the interpretation that these men were simply “churched” (an old “Baptist” word meaning expelled from the church). When a person is unwilling to repent of their sin, it becomes imperative that those in the church must break all ties with them. Therefore, they lose all benefit and protection that was given them by being part of a church family. They become outcast in this world which belongs to the devil.

The only other instance where someone in the Scriptures was “handed over to Satan” was in the church at Corinth, when a member was having an incestuous relationship with his own mother! And Paul commanded that the unrepentant sinner be excommunicated from the fellowship (**1 Corinthians 5:1-5**).

Jesus Himself also gave us the pattern for which such church discipline becomes necessary in **Matthew 18:**

“If your brother sins against you, go tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he won’t listen, take one or two others with you, so that by the testimony of two or three witnesses every fact may be established. If he doesn’t pay attention to them, tell the church. If he doesn’t pay attention even to the church, let him be like a Gentile and a tax collector to you.”

Matthew 18:15-17

There are people who infiltrate the church with the very worst of intentions. And when confronted with their transgressions they simply refuse to repent. If this unwillingness to submit to Scripture persists, then there is no other choice but to remove such a person from the fellowship. But if that should happen, note the reason for the expulsion: **“...so they may be taught not to blaspheme (vs. 20b).”**

So you see, the intended purpose of church discipline is so that once the rebellious sinner has been expelled from the fellowship, they will learn their lesson and repent so that they may be restored. Sadly to say, these days, more often than not, these people just go to another church and wreak havoc in the fellowship there as well. My father used to say, “*Son, if you have problems everywhere you go... then you’re the problem.*” Words of wisdom! The tragic reality is this; some folks never learn. And they cause division and discord everywhere they go. And when those people call themselves “Christian”, we are commanded in Scripture to have nothing to do with them. Listen to the words of Paul to the church at Corinth.

I wrote to you in a letter not to associate with sexually immoral people. I did not mean the immoral people of this world or the greedy and swindlers or idolators; otherwise you would have to leave this world. But actually, I wrote you not to associated with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister and is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or verbally abusive, a drunkard or a swindler. Do not even eat with such a person. For what business is it of mine to judge outsiders? Don’t you judge those who are inside? God judges outsiders. Remove the evil person from among you. **1 Corinthians 5:9-13**

So you see my friends, we in a spiritual war. It is our duty to fight. And the only way that we can win is to hold fast to the faith and keep a clean conscience. And this can only be done by clinging to The Word of God, along with effective prayer in communion with Christ Jesus continually. He is, and always shall be, our only source of empowerment to face the battles ahead. The enemy is seeking whom he may devour, but those who are in Christ do not fear his advances for he is powerless to defeat our LORD. Or as Martin Luther so eloquently stated in his famous hymn "*A Mighty Fortress is Our God*"

Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing,
Were not the right Man on our side,
The Man of God's own choosing.
You ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is He;
LORD Sabaoth His Name,
From age to age the same;
And He must win the battle.

A Mighty Fortress (circa 1527)

So let us put on our armor and prepare for battle. The victory is already won in Christ.

And let the soldiers in the army of God say... TRUTH!!!