

February 8/9, 2025

Why We Must Fight for the Truth
Understanding God's Design for the Church in 1 Timothy
1 Timothy 1:12-20
Pastor Bryan Clark

Last week, as we opened our study of 1 Timothy, we learned that Paul was very passionate in his instruction to Timothy, to command certain men to stop teaching strange doctrine. In our text this week, Paul will go so far as to tell Timothy, “You have to fight the good faith,” literally, “You have to war the warfare, to protect and keep right doctrine.” This raises the question, “Why is Paul so passionate about this, and what does it have to do with us today?” Well, that’s what we want to talk about. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 1 Timothy, Chapter 1.

Last week, we got up through verse 11. Starting in verse 12, the tone of the chapter changes pretty dramatically, as it becomes much more personal for Paul. Verse 12:

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, (*NASB, 1 Timothy 1:12)

So, what is Paul saying in verse 12? In verse 11, he ends by saying that the gospel *with which he has been entrusted*. It’s a word that basically is a banking term, and it means to make a deposit. So, if you think about the truth of doctrine—right doctrine—that God deposited into Paul, in order that then he would be trustworthy to protect it and guard it and pass it along. So, it’s a bit of a play on words. But in verse 12, the word that’s translated **strengthened** could just as easily be translated *enabled*, which I think is better in this context. So, God has *enabled* Paul. But the other part of that word that’s helpful to understand is the verb tense. Some of you are thinking, “I’m really excited to learn that this morning, but is it actually important?” It’s an aorist tense verb, and what makes that important is it’s something in the past that happened in a moment of time. So what Paul is not saying is, “All through his ministry, as a missionary of the gospel, God has strengthened him.” While that’s true, that’s not what he’s saying here. What he’s saying is, “At a moment in time, something happened that enabled him to be a missionary of the gospel,” and that something was his conversion—his radical conversion—that led to his calling to guard the truth that has been entrusted to him. What makes that so crazy is what we learn in verse 13:

...even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief;

If you don’t know the story of Paul before his conversion, he was a very scary guy. He was a real bad dude. The idea of blasphemy doesn’t necessarily make much of an impact on us because it happens all the time in our culture. But it’s important to understand, according to the Old Testament Law, blasphemy was a capital offense, subject to the death penalty. So this is a pretty big deal. Paul, in denying both who Jesus was and what Jesus had done for them, was blaspheming against God. But he also identifies himself as **a persecutor and violent aggressor**. That language

is not an exaggeration. This was a bad guy. People were terrified of him. The way he's described in the book of Acts, it says things like he was breathing threats and murder. It says he was hunting down Christians, men and women, in order to bind them, drag them back to Jerusalem and throw them in prison to be executed. We're told that when Stephen was stoned to death, (To be stoned to death was a very violent, bloody, gruesome way to die.) Stephen's only offense was he was a follower of Jesus. Yet the text tells us that Paul stood at that event and applauded the bloody, violent death of Stephen. So, this was a really bad guy.

He says, **yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief.** Now that's really interesting to think about what he just said there. Paul was not a secularist. He was not an atheist. Paul was not in a street gang. He was a Pharisee, a very religious follower of the Law. As a matter of fact, he describes himself as *a Pharisee of the Pharisees*. In terms of the Law, he describes himself as blameless. He was a very religious, self-righteous Pharisee. But yet he identifies he was **ignorant in his unbelief.** It was actually his religious, self-righteous zeal that became the barrier to the obvious truth about who Jesus was and what Jesus had done. His religion didn't get him to Jesus. It was the barrier that left him *ignorant of the truth*. I think that's very important to process.

Important especially for those of us that live in the Midwest, where there are lots of good, moral, highly religious people. They probably would check the box, "Christian" on a survey, yet they are so steeped in their own self-righteous moralism. They're so confident their religion has made them *good enough*. They have no real need of Jesus. You hear people say this all the time, "If anybody is going to get into heaven, I'll get into heaven. I'm as good as the next guy." Their religion is not leading them to Christ; it actually becomes the barrier that keeps them in their unbelief. There are two ways to avoid Jesus. One is by being very, very bad, but the other one is by being very, very good. A highly moralistic, religious person does not view himself or herself as a sinner. Therefore they have no real need for a savior. Oftentimes, in having these conversations, we will say one of the biggest problems for highly religious people in the Midwest is, "First you have to get them lost before they recognize their need for a savior." So that was Paul. Verse 14:

...and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, (The Greek is super-abundant.) with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am the foremost of all. (Vs. 14-15)

That statement, **It is a trustworthy statement**, is very unique to Paul. As a matter of fact, the only place it occurs in the New Testament is in the Pastoral Epistles: 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. But Paul uses it 17 times in the Pastoral Epistles. Contrary to the nonsense they're hearing from these false teachers, he is saying, but **this is a trustworthy statement.** The Greek that's translated, **deserving full acceptance**, carries the idea this is for everyone...anywhere in the world...at any time. The idea that Christianity is a Western religion, or that Christianity is an American religion, is utter nonsense. It would take you five minutes to do some research to realize how ridiculous that statement is. The reality is every person that draws breath on the face of the planet is a sinner before a holy God, and the only option on the table is what God has done for them through Jesus.

The reason Paul is so passionate about this message about guarding the truth that's been entrusted to him is, this is the truth that's changed his life. He was a bad guy. He was doing really bad things.

He was terrorizing people. And yet God, in His grace and mercy, saw fit to offer Paul salvation. It's the most hope-filled, inclusive message the world has ever heard. So, Paul is passionate that everyone would hear the truth: No matter who you are, no matter what you've done, no matter what's been done to you, God stands ready to offer you His grace and mercy in the salvation made possible through Jesus to those willing to receive it. Paul identifies himself as the *foremost of all sinners*. I don't think this is some pathetic attempt to come off as humble, like you hear sometimes with preachers, "Oh, I'm the worst of them all." That's not what he's saying. I think he believes with all of his heart that is true. The things he did were horrific. He was a bad guy. He was a really bad sinner. He believed that with all of his heart, yet, if there's enough grace and mercy for Paul, there's enough grace and mercy for anyone. No one is beyond the salvation that God offers. I think there's a challenge to those of us who have been Christians a long time, to lose sight of the reality that God would actually save a sinner like me. Paul never got over the wonder of how God's grace could be so amazing that he would experience God's salvation.

John Newton was another really bad guy. In the 17th century, he was a slave trader. He did absolutely atrocious things to people. They kidnapped people. They took them away from their land. They took them away from their families. They transported them in utterly deplorable conditions to get them to Europe, to sell them as a commodity, as slaves. That is how he made his living...until, eventually in his adult life, he encountered the resurrected Christ and he was deeply convicted of the terrible sins that he had committed...and accepted the amazing grace and mercy God offers. He then famously wrote the great hymn, "Amazing Grace". When he writes the lyric, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me", he meant that. He was a wretch. He was horrible, yet he experienced the grace and mercy of God that also saved Paul. He famously said in his 80's, "My memory is almost gone, but there are two things I remember. 'I am the great sinner, and Christ is the great Savior!'" Someone once said, "The closer you get to God, the more you see your need for a savior."

We learn a lot about ourselves as Christians by how we view the sinners around us. The self-righteous moralist is always judging and pointing fingers. But someone who has been truly transformed by the grace of God is always aware, "Were it not for the grace and mercy of God, that would be me." We dare not ever forget that. He goes on.

Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example, (a pattern) for those who would believe in Him for eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. (Vs.16-17)

So Paul says that his story becomes the pattern. It becomes the prototype, the example. If God could save someone like Paul, God can save anyone. People in the 1st century knew who Paul was. They knew what he had done. It was absolutely mind blowing that this same person who had terrorized Christians had now become a missionary of the gospel. It was very clear to people. If God can save Paul, he can save anyone...which causes him to erupt in this doxology of worship in verse 17.

I want to just highlight a couple of things of what he says. To recognize that, at the end of the story, there's only one King, and that King sits on the throne. He will never be dethroned; He'll

never be voted out of office; He'll never die. And at the end of the story, it's that one King that ultimately is our Judge. And the one King who ultimately is our Judge, is the same King that sent His Son to be our Savior. The world has never heard a message more full of hope than the gospel, which is why Paul is so passionate that what's been entrusted to him, he has to guard. Now he's entrusted it to Timothy. Timothy must guard it. Verse 18:

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, (Literally the Greek is war...the warfare.) keeping (the) faith (That's the doctrinal truth.) and a good conscience, (...living it out) 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)

So, think of it this way. The message of the gospel of truth was entrusted to Paul. Paul has now entrusted it to Timothy. Timothy has entrusted it to others...and to others...and to others...until it finally got to you. Now you have a responsibility to be a good steward of that truth, to fight the good fight, to war the warfare necessary to make sure this message is not lost...it's not compromised...it's not watered down...because it's the greatest life changing message ever!

And then he identifies two people who we really don't know who they are, who have **suffered shipwreck** because they've gone down a path of strange doctrine. Shipwreck is a very vivid imagery in the ancient world. Ephesus was a port city. People in the ancient world were terrified of the ocean, so this would have been really vivid imagery for them. So what does he mean when he says, **I have handed them over to Satan so that they will be taught not to blaspheme**? Well, this is kind of a big conversation and we only have a little bit of time, so I'm going to give you the brief summary.

If you put together Matthew 18, 1 Corinthians 5, and a few other passages, here's, basically, what's being said: When you commit yourself to a local church, you are submitting yourself to those in authority, primarily the elders. And within that umbrella is what I refer to as the protective umbrella of God's grace. It doesn't have anything to do with a building, so don't think building. You're under the protective umbrella of God's grace when you go to school, when you go to work, when you go home, wherever you're at. According to Matthew 18, that's what it means to be **bound**. We're **bound** together as the people of God under that umbrella. But when someone is teaching what's blasphemous—strange doctrine—it's the responsibility of the elders to define and defend right doctrine. You cannot simply allow that to continue, or pretty soon everybody is going to be so confused they won't know what's true anymore. So, Matthew 18 outlines a process to get it stopped. But if the person is determined not to listen, eventually they are released—put outside that protective umbrella of God's grace. Matthew 18 language is they are **loosed**. Again, it has nothing to do with the building. It has to do with this idea of being under the protective umbrella of God's grace. They can go to any church building, anywhere they want in town. That doesn't change anything, until there's repentance and a willingness to stop teaching strange doctrine. Once they're removed from the protective umbrella of God's grace, they are then vulnerable...subject to the attacks of Satan. That's what he's saying. In other words, Satan is going to beat the stuffing out of them, not to punish them but to teach them not to blaspheme, since they are now outside of the protective umbrella of God's grace. It's always with a heart towards repentance and

reconciliation, to get their attention, to get this corrected. For our purposes this morning, it's just a good reminder of how serious this issue is.

If you have trusted Jesus as Savior, the truth of the gospel has been entrusted to you. You now have a responsibility to be a guardian of the truth, to fight the good fight, to war the warfare, to make sure that God's truth is not compromised; it's not watered down. This is the message that has changed your life. Therefore, we're highly motivated that others might also hear this message, that they too might experience the grace and mercy of God.

This is true of what we do in here. But it's equally true of what happens in children's ministry, what happens in youth ministry, what happens in college ministry, what happens in adult ministry, what happens in a Life Group, what happens in a support group. Anything that's happening under the umbrella of Lincoln Berean Church, we must be absolutely passionate about rightly dividing the word of truth and guarding this message that has so changed our lives, in order that others might experience the grace and mercy of God. What are we doing here? That's what we're doing here!

Our Father, we're thankful for the truth. In a world of lies, You have told us the truth, and that truth has changed our lives. Lord, may we be good stewards, guardians of the truth, for the sake of others who need to know the truth that has set us free. Lord, may we be faithful stewards. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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WINTER 2025 // WEEK 5

Life Group Questions

1 Timothy – What Are We Doing Here? // February 8/9, 2025

Why We Must Fight for the Truth // 1 Timothy 1:12-20

Introduction

This week Pastor Bryan finished 1 Timothy chapter 1 in which Paul uses his own life story to show evidence of the patient mercy of God. We can be confident that his instruction to the early church in Ephesus provides a foundation of faith for us to land on as well.

We invite you to look over all the questions on the following pages and write your thoughts down before you meet with your group. Some people even use these questions to take notes during the sermon. The questions are meant to stir your thinking and prompt open discussion, and we do not expect you to cover every question each week.

Warm Up *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

- 1) What is something from this last week that you are proud of?

- 2) Describe a time when you were a kid and you did something you knew was wrong, but you still decided to do it anyway.

Getting Started

Transition into group discussion.

- 1) Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:
 - a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
 - b. For the fruit of the Spirit to be cultivated in your lives
 - c. For grace to hear and apply what the Spirit says to you
- 2) Choose someone to read the passage aloud for the group.

Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

- 1) In our passage this week, we saw that Paul was blinded to the truth about Jesus by his religious legalism. Pastor Clark said there are two ways to avoid Jesus, one is by being very bad and the other is by being very good. **How do you see either/both of these lived out in our midwestern context?**

- 2) In verses 12-17, Paul gives a short version of his personal testimony. **What do you see as being some of the themes of his testimony?**

Are there any parts of his faith journey that you relate to in your relationship with Jesus?

Set aside some time to write down your personal testimony in a few sentences (similar to Paul's example). **If you'd like, share it with your group when you meet.**

- 3) Paul's story shows us that we can be well-meaning and still be completely wrong. **Reflect a bit on a time when you needed correction for a wrong attitude or action. How did you know you needed to make a change?**

How does truth and a good conscience bring about change in behavior?

- 4) **In verse 18, what does Paul mean when he says to “fight the good fight?”** (hint: look in 1 Timothy 1:5 from last week)

Pastor Bryan has mentioned that guarding the truth and obeying the truth go hand in hand in keeping us on the right track of faith. **How do we as believers today make sure that we are guarding and obeying the Truth in a world that doesn’t recognize objective truth?**

- 5) A phrase, “delivered over to Satan” is used in verse 20 that may be unfamiliar to us today. **How did Pastor Bryan describe that in relation to a church community?**

What can we learn from this about the importance of faithfully teaching God’s Word in our own church?

In what ways does your Life Group help you uphold the Truth of God’s Word?

Personal Spiritual Exercises

Just like physical exercises help strengthen and stretch our bodies for healthy living, these spiritual exercises are meant to move us spiritually in ways that may be new so we might experience inner growth. Since God longs for us to experience Him with our whole selves—mind, body, spirit—we invite you along each week to strengthen your souls with suggestions and prompts.

Scripture Focus: In our passage this week, Paul extolls the glory of God (1 Tim 1:17). Likewise, Isaiah 40:13-31 is a richly woven praise of our Almighty God. Read through it a few times this week, and jot down all the attributes of God it describes.

Prayer Focus: Paul demonstrated his gratitude for the saving mercy of Jesus he enjoyed. Consider how Jesus has met you in your journey of faith and write your own prayer of gratitude this week. You may even want to share it in your Life Group to encourage them as well.

Prayer *(Suggested time: 20 min)*

A significant part of “coming together” is being open and honest with our lives. Sitting in a group of people for prayer may be new or it may be familiar to you. If you would rather not pray aloud when it is your turn, feel free to pray silently and then say “Amen” aloud signaling the next person in the group to pray. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone is a participant in sharing this time before God together.

Take a few moments to prepare a prayer request. What did the message, working through the above questions or the discussion cause you to notice about your own relationship with Jesus? Would you be willing to share your prayer request with the group?