



This lesson emphasizes the nature of the Christian life as a 'struggle' or a 'fight.' The foundation for this is two Greek words that are prominent in the above scripture passages: (1) *στρατεία* (*strateia*, the noun) and *στρατεύω* (*strateuo*, the verb) both are found in 1 Tim. 1:18, and (2) *ἄγών* (*agon*, the noun) and *ἀγωνίζω* (*agonidzo*, the verb) found in 1 Tim. 6:12 and 2 Tim. 4:7.

Military Service. The first set of words found in 1 Tim. 1:18 is not very common in the New Testament. The noun only shows up twice (1 Tim. 1:18 and 2 Cor. 10:4) and the verb occurs seven times (Lk. 3:14; 1 Cor. 9:7; 2 Cor. 10:3; 1 Tim. 1:18; 2 Tim. 2:4; Jas. 4:1; 1 Pet. 2:11). The noun carries the idea of a military campaign or expedition and is thus usually translated as 'fight' or 'warfare.' Both uses of the noun are at figurative level of meaning with *στρατεία* as a symbol of Christian activity. The verb conveys the sense of doing military service or serving in an army. The verb is used to refer to literal military duty (2 Tim. 2:4; 1 Cor. 9:7) but mostly as a figure of speech describing Christian service (cf. 2 Cor. 10:3; 1 Tim. 1:18; Jas. 4:1; 2 Pet. 2:11). Three related words also show up in the New Testament, but not in our passages: (1) *στράτευμα* ('army'; 8x), (2) *στρατιώτης* (soldier; 26x), and (3) *στρατιά* ('army'; 2x). The figurative level of meaning of these words is central to our study.

Athletic Contest. The second set of words that show up in 1 Tim. 6 and 2 Tim. 4, *ἄγών* (*agon*, the noun; 6x in Phil. 1:30; Col. 2:1; 1 Thess 2:2; 1 Tim. 2:2, 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7; Heb. 12:1) and *ἀγωνίζω* (*agonidzo*, the verb; 8x in Lk. 13:24; Jhn. 18:36; 1 Cor. 9:25; Col. 1:29, 4:12; 1 Tim. 4:10, 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7) is also not very frequent in the New Testament. These words most often were used in reference to athletics in the ancient world and typically are translated as 'struggle' or 'fight' as would be involved when competing in a wrestling or boxing match. The figurative level of meaning is the exclusive way both noun and verb are used in the New Testament. Thus Christian service is pictured as an athletic contest.

In understanding how these word pictures relate to the Christian life, we must carefully examine the statements surrounding these words. The scripture context imposes limits on how these metaphors can describe legitimate Christian service. Certainly this was true in the first century world since both soldiers and athletes were not known for their virtues or moral standards, nor for any religious devotion. In fact, just the opposite was normally the situation. Both groups of men in the first century Roman world typically exemplified life styles that Christianity soundly condemned. Thus the New Testament use of these images picks up basically on the common trait normally present in both groups of men: high levels of self-discipline and devotion to duty. This is the central point made from these word pictures. The negative traits associated with both ancient soldiers and athletes are not involved in the use of these images.

The Bible student makes a serious mistake by ignoring this principle of interpretation. By such miss interpretation, all kinds of conduct can be given some semblance of legitimacy. Attitudes such as anger, especially at enemies or opponents, cannot be legitimized through these symbols. Unchristian, ungodly actions -- like a 'holy war' stance -- have no legitimate basis because of these word pictures. Yet, Christian history is littered with both unchristian attitudes and actions that have been 'justified' by professing Christians on the basis of these two metaphors.

1 Tim. 1:18-20

^{BGT} 1Ti 1:18 Tauthn thn paraggelían paratigēmai, soi(teknon Timoqee(kata. taj proagousaj epi. se. profhteiaj(iha *strateuh/en* autaij thn kalhn *strateian*¹⁹ ecwn pistin kai. agaqhñ suneidhsin(hñ tinej apwsamenoi peri. thn pistin enauaghsan(²⁰ wn estin -Umenaioj kai. VAlexandroj(ouj paredwka tw/ satana(iha paiduqwsin mh. blasfhmeinh

^{NRS} 1Ti 1:18 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*,¹⁹ having faith and a good conscience. By rejecting conscience, certain persons have suffered shipwreck in the faith;²⁰ among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have turned over to Satan, so that they may learn not to blaspheme.

^{NIV} 1Ti 1:18 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*,¹⁹ holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith.²⁰ Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.

^{NLT} 1Ti 1:18 Timothy, my son, here are my instructions for you, based on the prophetic words spoken about you earlier. May they give you the confidence to *fight* well in the Lord's battles.¹⁹ Cling tightly to your faith in Christ, and always keep your conscience clear. For some people have deliberately violated their consciences; as a result, their faith has been shipwrecked.²⁰ Hymenaeus and Alexander are two examples of this. I turned them over to Satan so they would learn not to blaspheme God.

^{NAS} 1Ti 1:18 This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may *fight* the good *fight*,¹⁹ keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.²⁰ Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered over to Satan, so that they may be taught not to blaspheme.

Comments:

In this single sentence in the Greek text above, Timothy is reminded of some important issues that will be significant for his leadership over the Christian community at Ephesus. Verses 18-20 resume the instruction begun in verses 3-11. Timothy was facing some huge challenges in trying to solve numerous problems that existed in the Christian community there. Verses 18-20 become something of an encouragement to Timothy to brace himself for this difficult task.

Let's break down this long Greek sentence into its component elements and see what 'fighting a good fight' involves.

The core assertion is found at the beginning in the expression, **This instruction I place before you.** This goes back to the initial instruction found in verses 3 and 4: "I urge you, as I did when I was on my way to Macedonia, to remain in Ephesus so that you may instruct certain people not to teach any different doctrine, and not to occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies that promote speculations rather than the divine training that is known by faith." Timothy's task was (1) to correct the false understanding of Christian belief by some at Ephesus, and (2) to help them avoid getting mired down in unproductive interpretation of the Old Testament. The reference to myths and endless genealogies can refer to a combination of fictitious Jewish distortions of the Old Testament and of Gnostic myths about creation. The ancient Jewish writing called the Book of Jubilees may illustrate what was in mind here. For an English translation of this text see <http://www.ccel.org/c/charles/otpseudepig/jubilee/1.htm>. The heart of Timothy's task was to help them understand both their Christian faith and the scriptural basis for it. Verses 5-11 elaborate on some of the details.

The first expansion element off the core statement is "**according to the previously made prophecies about you.**" Some good things had been said about Timothy prior to this time. When Paul first met Timothy in Galatia at the beginning of the second missionary journey, Luke said of Timothy, "He was well spoken of by the believers in Lystra and Iconium" (Acts 16:2). 1 Tim. 4:14 alludes to positive predictions

about Timothy made at his being set aside for Christian service. The point of this is that Timothy was to remember the high expectations others had for him, and to draw inspiration from that.

The second expansion element is the purpose clause **so that you may fight with them the noble fight**. The idea is that Paul's instructions, ultimately encompassing everything in this letter, will provide Timothy the necessary equipment for his spiritual tour of duty. By defining Timothy's task of straightening out the mistaken beliefs of some at Ephesus as a military tour of duty, Paul called Timothy to a high level of commitment and focused attention to this task. This was serious work that called for the best from Timothy. He needed strict disciplined commitment if the task were to be successfully completed. This task is also characterized as a noble tour of duty. At the heart of this is the reminder that helping people get their 'theology straightened out' is a worthy undertaking. The high expectations about Timothy, i.e., **with them**, would be a means of helping him carry out his tour of duty.

These two expansion elements build off the foundational statement **This instruction....** But the remaining two expansion elements elaborate on the purpose **so that...** clause.

First is **possessing faith and a good conscience which some by rejecting have suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith**. Timothy's tour of duty needed to be accompanied by two things: a firm faith in Christ Jesus and a clear conscience. The real presence of the indwelling Christ reinforced by a pattern of behavior growing out of obedience to Christ become powerful sources of encouragement and faithfulness. Reference is made to some at Ephesus who have rejected a clear conscience and thus have suffered great spiritual harm to their commitment to Jesus. Few things can erode our spiritual commitment more rapidly than engaging in unholy patterns of conduct.

Second is **among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I've handed over to Satan so that they may be disciplined to not blaspheme**. These two individuals are among those having suffered shipwreck. These names show up elsewhere in 2 Tim. 2:17; 4:14-15; Acts 19:33 but there's no way to know whether the same individuals are being indicated. The Hymenaeus in 2 Tim. 2:17 has mistakenly taught that the resurrection of the believer has already taken place rather than being ahead at the second coming of Christ. If the same person, then he has come under the influence of ancient Christian Gnostic teaching that turned the resurrection of the body at the second coming of Christ into a spiritual resurrection of the soul that takes place at conversion. The references to an Alexander in 2 Tim. 4:14-15 and Acts 19:33 most likely do not refer to this Alexander, since the one here is a part of the Christian community and the other one viciously opposed Christianity and Paul. Paul has led the Ephesian community earlier to take disciplinary action against these two by excluding them from participation in the Christian community, i.e., the turning them over to Satan. Note the redemptive intent behind this disciplinary action: **so that they may be disciplined to not blaspheme**. They were valuable to the Ephesian community of faith, if they could be corrected and returned to faithful service.

1 Tim. 6:2b-12

^{BNT} 1Ti 6:2b Tauta didaske kai. paraka³lei ei; tij eterodidaskalei/ kai. mh. prosercetai ugiainousin logoij toi^j tou/ kuriou hmwh Vhsou/ Cristou/ kai. th^j kat' eusebeian didaskalia⁴ tetufwtai(mhden epistamenoj(al¹ la. noswh peri. zhthseij kai. logomaciaj(ex wn ginetai fqonoj erij blasfhmiai(uponoiai ponhrai(⁵diaparatribai. diefqarmenwn anqrwpwn ton nouh kai. apesterrhmenwn th^j al¹ hqeiaj(nomizontwn porismon einai thn eusebeian⁶: Estin de. porismoj megaj h eusebeia meta. autarkeiaj⁷ ourden gar eishnegkamen eij ton kosmon(o¹ti oude. exenegkei^h ti dunameqa⁸ econtej de. diatrofaj kai. skepasmata(tou¹toi^j arkesqhsomeqa⁹ oi¹ de. boulomenoi plouteih empiptousin eij peirasmon kai. pagida kai. epiqumiaj pollaj anohtouj kai. blabera^j(aittinej buqizousin touj anqrwpouj eij oleqron kai. apw¹leian¹⁰ riza gar pantwn twh kakwh estin h filarguria(hj tinej oregomenoi apeplanhqhsan apo. th^j pistewj kai. eautouj periepeiran odunaij pollaij¹¹

¹¹ Su. de(w-anqrwpe qeou(tauta feuge¹² diwke de. dikaiosunhn eusebeian pistin(agaphn upomonhn prau¹paqian¹² agwnizou ton kalon agwha th^j pistewj(epilabou/ th^j aiwniou zwh^j(eij h¹h eklhqhj kai. wmolohsaj thn kalhn omologian enwpion pol¹wh marturwn¹

^{NRS} 1Ti 6:2b Teach and urge these duties.³ Whoever teaches otherwise and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that is in accordance with godliness,⁴ is conceited, understanding nothing, and has a morbid craving for controversy and for disputes about words. From these come envy, dissension, slander, base suspicions,⁵ and wrangling among those who are depraved in mind and bereft of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.

⁶ Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment;⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it;⁸ but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these.⁹ But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

¹¹ But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness.¹² Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

^{NIV} 1Ti 6:2b These are the things you are to teach and urge on them.³ If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching,⁴ he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions⁵ and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain.⁷ For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.⁸ But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.⁹ People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

¹¹ But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.¹² Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

^{NLT} 1Ti 6:2b Teach these truths, Timothy, and encourage everyone to obey them.³ Some false teachers may deny these things, but these are the sound, wholesome teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ, and they are the foundation for a godly life.⁴ Anyone who teaches anything different is both conceited and ignorant. Such a person has an unhealthy desire to quibble over the meaning of words. This stirs up arguments ending in jealousy, fighting, slander, and evil suspicions.⁵ These people always cause trouble. Their minds are corrupt, and they don't tell the truth. To them religion is just a way to get rich.

⁶ Yet true religion with contentment is great wealth.⁷ After all, we didn't bring anything with us when we came into the world, and we certainly cannot carry anything with us when we die.⁸ So if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content.⁹ But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction.¹⁰ For the love of money is at the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows.

¹¹ But you, Timothy, belong to God; so run from all these evil things, and follow what is right

and good. Pursue a godly life, along with faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness.¹² Fight the good fight for what we believe. Hold tightly to the eternal life that God has given you, which you have confessed so well before many witnesses.

Comments:

In this section additional elaboration on Timothy's responsibilities is provided, primarily in contrast with a negative characterization of the actions and conduct of those espousing false teaching at Ephesus. There seems to be an intentional paralleling of 6:2b-10 with 1:3-10, as well as 6:11-16 with 1:12-17. The passage divides itself naturally into three segments: vv. 2b-5, 6-10, and 11-12. We will take a look at each of these segments.

In verse 2b the admonition, **Teach and urge these duties**, gathers up the emphasis contained in 2:1 through 6:10 and collectively comprise the healthy teaching that Timothy is urged to communicate at Ephesus. Two characterizations of this sound teaching are stressed: (1) it has its foundation in the words attributed to Jesus, and (2) it promotes godly living. Teaching that is contrary to this is negatively characterized in terms of bad motivation, lack of content, and oriented toward controversy. The bottom line is set forth in verse five where religious devotion is perceived as a way to make money.

The next segment, vv. 6-10, underscores the dangers of wealth, especially when combined with religion. For the servant of Christ, getting ahead doesn't include focusing on accumulation of material wealth. Instead, genuine advancement in life combines godliness with material contentment. Particularly is this important for the spiritual leader to recognize. Contentment (αὐταρκεία) was a central emphasis of the contemporary Stoic and Cynics philosophical movements. "It denoted 'self-sufficiency,' 'contentment' and characterized an attitude that cherished simplicity and a life lived in acceptance of the hand dealt out by nature or fortune. Here perhaps more clearly than anywhere else in the Pastorals we can see a pattern of Christianity in which specific Christian teaching and virtues like love are integrated with already acknowledged virtues cherished by others (cf. particularly Phil 4:8, 11)." [Interpreter's Bible, vol. 11, online at iPreach] The combining of these two virtues creates a powerful motivation for living with joy and happiness.

In the final segment, vv. 11-12, Timothy is admonished in a variety of directions: to turn away from seeing religion as a money making vehicle, and instead, to focus on positive traits that produce faithfulness in service. His beginning confession (v. 12) was promising; he needed to serve consistent with this confession.

From this passage, the 'good fight' still revolves around a disciplined commitment to both live and teach the apostolic gospel. This involves avoiding the pitfalls of self-centered motivation, especially combining this with a greed for material accumulation. As Jesus said, One can't serve both God and mammon (Mt. 6:24). To be so split minded is to render useless our prayer, Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven (Mt. 6:10b).

2 Tim. 4:6-8

^{BNT} 2Ti 4:6 Ἐγὼ γὰρ ἡδὴ σπένδομαι (καὶ ὁ καιρὸς τῆς ἀναλυσέωστί μου ἐφ᾽ ἑσθλῆς) ⁷ τὸν καλὸν ἀγῶνα ἡγωνίσμαι (τὸν δρόμον τέτελεκα) (τὴν πίστιν τήτρηκα) ⁸ ὁποῦν ἀποκείται μοι ὁ τῆς δικαιοσύνης στεφάνος (ὁ ἁποδώσει μοι ὁ κύριος ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ) (ὁ δίκαιος κρίσει) (οὐ μόνον ἐμοί, ἀλλὰ καὶ πᾶσι τοῖς ἠγαπήκοσι τὴν ἐπιφάνειαν αὐτοῦ)

^{NRS} 2Ti 4:6 As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

^{NIV} 2Ti 4:6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. ⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸Now there is in store 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 longed for his appearing.

^{NLT} 2Ti 4:6 As for me, my life has already been poured out as an offering to God. The time of my death is near. ⁷I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. ⁸And now the prize awaits me — the crown of righteousness that the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that great day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his glorious return.

Comments:

This final passage reflects the feelings of the old apostle himself just before his martyrdom at the hands of emperor Nero in the middle 60s (v. 6). Reflection back across some three plus decades of faithful Christian service resulted in the satisfaction of having been true to his calling by Jesus on the Damascus road years before (v. 7). But the backward glance prompts a forward anticipation (v. 8). Paul anticipated a “Well done thou good and faithful servant” evaluation of his life in final judgment. Not some special reward for having been The Apostle Paul. No, just the final acceptance that has been promised by the Lord to all who are devoted to Him.

For Paul the past was satisfying and the future was glorious. May each of us come to that final moment on earth with the same feelings!