

Feb. 25, 2018

Lesson 13: The Good Fight of Faith

Scripture: 1 Timothy 6: 11-21

Context:

Our closing lesson on faith in action moves to the letter of First Timothy. First Timothy is considered a “Pastoral Letter” in the New Testament. “Pastoral letter” does not mean that the only reader is a pastor, but the letter addresses questions crucial to the health of the laity including the discipline of prayer, the meaning of worship, care for others, and sound teaching for holy living.¹ The contents of the letter are to give any reader, lay or clergy, direction on how to care for others and follow Christ. In the New Testament, there are three “Pastoral letters:” First Timothy, Second Timothy, and Titus.

The author of this letter is attributed to Paul written to Timothy, one of Paul’s companions in his earliest missionary journeys.² Timothy’s lineage included a Greek gentile father and a Jewish Christian woman Eunice.³ Timothy came with Paul at a time when there was a transition of Christianity from one continent to another, Asia and Europe, as they went on missions to Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea.⁴ Timothy would have seen both the highs and lows of Paul’s ministry and would have learned about how to help lead churches. Thus, their relationship would have been like a mentor to a younger colleague. Most of the letter is an exhortation encouraging Timothy to choose wisely when it came to leadership and to exercising good judgment in advising the congregations. This chapter could be read to any church, but there is belief that the church may have been in Ephesus as Paul sent Timothy there for several years.⁵

Our passage today comes in the last chapter of First Timothy. In this final exhortation, Paul encourages the young Timothy and all who read to run away from things that are harmful such as avaricious, double-talking troublemakers who harm all those they can. Instead, Christians are to be righteous by holy living with faithfulness, love, endurance, and gentleness. Paul reminds Timothy of his own ordination by the other elders to keep going the route he has been called and to be a part of the good fight of faith. These words were especially powerful as the church found itself in a vulnerable time that included persecution, reviling, and provocation.⁶ Christ as Lord does not mean that you will be protected from trying times. All leaders in the early church needed encouragement and hope in those difficult moments.

The second part of the passage (verses seventeen through twenty-one), give counsel about dealing with specific issues in the life of the congregation. The first is the amount of wealth in the church. The pastor is called to counsel the wealthy with instruction about their wealth and how they are to move away from an inordinate desire

¹ Thomas C. Oden, “First and Second Timothy and Titus,” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (John Knox Press: Louisville, KY, 1989), 1.

² Acts 13:1-14:28, NRSV.

³ Acts 16: 1-2, NRSV.

⁴ Oden, “First and Second Timothy and Titus,” 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 83.

for more wealth. It is a spiritual matter as they are to share it with others and there they will find what is truly life giving.

The final piece of advice for young Timothy is to remember the teachings of Paul and the good news of the Gospel. As conflict comes up with people knowing everything and not listening, Timothy is to stay the course leaning on the apostolic tradition and the received saying of Jesus.⁷ He is not to get too lofty and listen to people who seem to have all the answers, yet miss the point of Jesus' teachings and the good news of Jesus Christ. In other words, avoid those who want to spread false knowledge.

Application:

As a young pastor, I have always loved this book because I feel a kindred spirit with Timothy as he navigates leading the early church. I am reminded that from generation to generation, the church deals with similar issues. The counsel in this letter continues to speak to churches today.

The first piece of advice given is crucial. Our world seems to enjoy maliciousness, anger, and getting your point across regardless of who you hurt in the process. However, we are urged here to pursue holy living with faithfulness, love, endurance, and gentleness. This does not mean giving in to people or allowing them to mistreat you. This counsel means that we are to be calm even in setting up boundaries with toxic people. As followers of Christ that is what we are called to do. One thing I have noticed is that when others or I respond with passive aggressiveness or self-righteousness, we lose sight of that person and create an even bigger mess than we intend. Things become a vicious cycle. As you go about your interactions, think about ways that Jesus interacted with others. Set boundaries and speak the truth in love.

The second piece of advice is also important. As Christians we are called not to place our hope in the amount of money we make nor are we to hoard our wealth. The membership to the country club, the extra homes, and the luxuries of life are not bad things. But are you tithing to your church? Are you giving back to different charitable causes? As Christians we are called to put our money where our mouth is meaning that if Christ is your Lord, then it will be reflected by your bank account.

The last piece of advice reminds us that we are to hold to things that are important. As I think of this in the church, I am reminded of conversations where people try to get into "us versus them" competitions or worship wars. Sometimes people want to spread ugly rumors to advance themselves or use knowledge as a weapon instead of a tool. You could be the best Bible scholar or know the most about this type of worship service or specific ministry. Yet, if you don't know how to share love or grace with others, then you miss the point of knowledge and your own gifts. In fact, you miss that you are a part of the body of Christ with Christ as the head. As disciples of Jesus Christ we are to hold fast to the knowledge that we don't know everything, but that we are called to be servants of Christ. We are to grow daily in mercy and love. We are to love our neighbors as ourselves. And most importantly, we are to submit ourselves to Jesus Christ, the one who is Lord and Savior of all.

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⁷ Ibid., 127.

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