

Guard the Faith

Let us turn to our Bibles to 1st Timothy chapter 6. 1st Timothy chapter 6. Finishing off Timothy, I will be going into 2nd Timothy next, and then finishing in Titus. So 1st Timothy 6, 20-21, let us listen attentively to the Word of God. O Timothy, guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge.

By professing it, some have strayed concerning the faith. In grace be with you. Amen.

Let us pray. In these words, God, we read a final exhortation of Paul to the young pastor Timothy, and through him, to all pastors and indirectly to all believers, that we are called, God, according to our various vocations in life, to guard what was committed to us, the truth of your Word. Gracious God and Savior, and to that end, may we be encouraged and strengthened, and given better illumination if we are confused in some regards to this important topic in the Christian life, we pray.

By the blood of our Savior, Amen. So it's appropriate that Paul ends his letter to the young pastor with a call to stand his ground and to protect the truth of God entrusted to him, especially in a public fashion, for his is a public office, dealing with public truth. The letter has been a series of warnings, as you may recall, exhortations, and even descriptions of his job and work as a pastor, with particular duties and teaching needed for what was before him in his churches.

But in all of Paul's words, an important truth underlines it, that is, Timothy must preserve the faith, because if we don't preserve and guard it, there is nothing more for the office of the pastor, or for the church, for that matter. How and what that looks like isn't important. You may think it's more important, perhaps, for yourself, but it's important for the church, for public officers, to take this to heart.

In that sense, we are the gatekeepers to what is in the church and what should be cast out of the church with respect to the truth, per se. And, of course, excommunication is an act of all the officers, the ruling elders, and the pastor, but I mean the preaching of the word. Pastors call to guard the faith here, the first point.

Pastor Called to Guard the Faith

We owe Timothy. He's exhorting him. He's excited.

He's zealous that this young man not lose sight of this one truth before he finishes this letter. It has been committed to you. Guard what was committed to your trust.

Here the idea is, of course, goods placed in a trust or a deposit. What was committed to pastors, what is unique to them, that they are to guard, that is what they teach. This is their job.

That's why we use the word preacher, pastor. In other words, of course, like minister is another word for servant. But preacher, pastor, teacher, there's three names right there that emphasize the feeding and the instruction of the word of God in a public fashion.

Everything given to him, of course, in this letter, but not only in this letter, all the truth of the word of God is there to be guarded and protected. It's a deposit given to the body of Christ, in particular to the pastors of the church, as they are called and equipped to defend and to dispense the truth to God's people. And even to the unbelievers, they need to hear the law and the gospel in their capacity as well.

Two things are entrusted here, it seems to me, the doctrine and doctrine that applies to the practices as well, doctrine and practices as given in this book in particular, that is the exhortation and other practical matters, as you recall here, exhortations to men, exhortations to women, exhortations about church officers, exhortations about members of the church, do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, older women as mothers and the like, how to deal with widows. So it's practical things as well, doctrine applied to this life, but doctrine nevertheless, teaching is what we mean there. All that is what he's called to guard and to preserve and to stand firm in his ministry as a pastor.

It is true that the Bible is not only for pastors, you have access to the Bible, and the way, of course, back then they didn't have a printing press, they had scribes, it took a long time, there weren't Bibles in every household at the time, they were greatly dependent upon pastors. And that, perhaps, over time, means that we lose sight of the importance of that office, because, yes, you have access to the Word of God, and that's a blessing. You have it with you in your computer, you have it with you at home, you probably have multiple Bibles at home, each kid has a Bible, I wouldn't be surprised.

But pastors have a unique relationship and responsibility, the rest of us do not have, if they didn't, there wouldn't be a description there in chapter 3 about the office of the bishop, slash pastor, slash presbyter, slash minister, all these different titles, and what he's called to do, and the responsibility and requirements that he must have to have this office. It is, I'll remind us again, very much like what we have in politics, in real life, in the rest of this world, where people represent America, a diplomat, has an official power and authority you do not have, although you can be overseas, and you can tell the foreign government, our government's going to war with you, and they're just going to laugh at you, and say, who are you, you're just a private citizen, I don't know you from a hole in the wall. But if a diplomat says it, it's all the difference in the world, the authority behind that office, parallel to the kind of authority a pastor is supposed to wield as well.

And what's he called to do with this deposit, you heard me say it several times, guard it, preserve it, stand firm, and protect it. It's used, that word in 1 Timothy 5, 21, to preserve as well, you can have the idea of preserving it. The idea that struck me immediately in my head, or two-fold, a shepherd and a watchman.

Shepherd and watchman guard and protect and preside over people and things. Luke 2, 8 we read, now they were in the same country, shepherds living out in the field, keeping watch, there's that word again, over their flock by night, guarding the flock. Here, of course,

real animals, but the shepherds of the church are supposed to guard the flock of Christ, your souls.

Real people, Christians. I think also of the proverbial sheepdog, who's eager and ready to defend the flock from every foe and enemy. And that's the kind of pastor you want.

That's the kind of leadership you want in your churches. Pastors who take this job seriously. Ezekiel 33 is the other picture or metaphor, not just shepherds, but watchmen.

That's out of the Old Testament, of course, in that classic passage in chapter 33. But if the watchman sees the sword coming, that is to the city, and does not blow the trumpet, he's there on the wall, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood I will acquire at the watchman's hand. That's a serious responsibility.

To watch the city from oncoming enemies and armies that wish to destroy it and kill the families. And same with the body of Christ. Doubly more with the body of Christ, brothers and sisters, because we are talking about the souls of men and women and children to be preserved from lies, soul-crushing lies and heresies, and even half-truths.

Like the prophets of old, pastors are given knowledge of impending harm. We have the word of God. We have the common sense and the gifts of knowledge of the current situation, and we should, of wherever the church is in history.

And to apply, therefore, the doctrines, the truth, to the church for their protection. And they should cry out for a warning when things are bad enough. It's an evolved work, this guarding, requires what? Paying attention to times and seasons in which we find ourselves, such as the sons of Issachar in the Old Testament.

They are wise men because they understood the times and the seasons they found themselves and adjusted accordingly and knew what the church needed at the time. And we are called the same as pastors and leaders in the church to be the sons of Issachar. It's a two-fold work.

That is, there's two objectives there. External, which makes sense. Those wolves and enemies outside the church that wish to come into the church and take away the sheep of God's flock.

And, of course, internal threats. Those pretending to be one of us, but were never of us, as 1 John reminds us in Chapter 2. Wolves in sheep clothing. It's a very serious responsibility to guard, to preserve, and to protect.

The faith, yes, committed to the trust, but the faith as it affects the body of Christ in particular, not just in the abstract. Timothy should be thinking of the people under his care and what they believe or don't believe and how that is detrimental to them or healthy to them. And he continues to describe this guarding.

Guard what was committed to your trust. Avoiding the profane and idle babblings. Dodge, get away from, is the idea there.

It's strong. Profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge. Not real truth.

It's fake truth. It's fake knowledge. Profane and idle babblings.

It's a broad term. These are here for offensive and unhelpful talking and the like. These words were used elsewhere by Paul and Timothy.

Detail with similar ideas. Sometimes the same exact word, other times similar ideas. In the prior chapters, there in 1 Timothy 1, 3 for example, we read early on in the letter, don't give heed to fables and endless genealogies which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith.

That's the kind of vain babbling that brings about lack of peace or destruction of unity in the body of Christ. The word there, fable, the translator has the idea of legend or fiction. It's not real.

Not historically true. It may allude to Gnostic teaching of some special approach to genealogies and its relationship to the teaching of this time, the heretical teaching. Endless genealogies, it mentions there as well.

Fables and endless genealogies. Speculations were very prevalent apparently of genealogies in Judaism, especially Hellenistic Judaism. As one commentator puts it, or they may have become involved in some of the fantasies about genealogies found in those who had been influenced by Philo's more extravagant teaching issuing from among the Jews of Alexandria, northern Africa.

Among other things, with him, the names and the genealogies represented the various conditions of the soul. He plays this weird spirituality on the genealogies. Titus 1.14 we read, not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth.

So there's the word fable again used elsewhere in 1 Timothy to describe the kind of babbling going on and profane teaching. Some kind of Jewish half-truths are going on here and affecting the body of Christ, which makes sense because there's a lot of Jewishness here. The New Testament church came forth from the Jewish church of the Old Testament.

In Titus 3.9 we read, but avoid foolish disputes. Genealogies, there you have it, the same sentence, contentions and strivings about the law, for they are what? Unprofitable and useless. They cause problems.

We're not dealing with serious doctrine here, but these side discussions, apparently, serious side discussions, that sideline the godliness of the church and bring about contention and arguments and the like. That's what he's dealing with. Again in chapter 4, verse 7 of 1 Timothy, we read, but reject profane, there's that word, and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness.

Do good things. Don't be idle over here about profane and old wives' fables. So there it's coupled with old wives' fables or old wives' tales.

Here it's coupled with idle babbling. That is, things that are not edifying, so it's a degree of them. It can be just simple things.

As I said, you have some kind of mystical approach to the genealogies, to more serious errors like denying the deed of Christ. That's a very serious problem. Wouldn't call that babbling as such, but perhaps he has the idea of just saying, it's so worthless, it's such a lie, so clearly a lie, it might as well just be like a baby babbling.

Whatever the case is, there's degrees of profane, un-edifying, babbling, and teaching, and so-called knowledge. It's false knowledge. It's fake.

It's not real. And again, in 2 Timothy 2.16, but shun profane and idle babbling so they will increase to more ungodliness. That's his concern.

Whatever you're going over in these churches, he's saying, doesn't give a lot of details, I point out. His biggest concern is, what's the effect? What's it doing to the body of Christ? These kind of strange teachings with vain and babbling teaching. Profane, even.

Some things are perhaps about marriage and nature and eating, which is what Timothy dealt with earlier in the, or Paul dealt with earlier in the book of Timothy. Or Jewish fables, as he explicitly mentions a couple of times in some of his letters. Now, another description he has here, profane and idle babblings, and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge.

That is, it's false knowledge. It's not real knowledge. Contradictions, of course.

Illogical, excuse me, objections or arguments. A description of profane and babbling words, perhaps. When he says profane and babbling words, I also mean they are contradictory words.

They are falsely called knowledge. They're not real things. It's false teaching.

People who claim to have the truth, and they don't. He calls it out. Now, he doesn't call it out by name, but he certainly uses strong words there.

They're just gibberish, perhaps we would say to him. What are you talking about? Don't deal with this. Stay away from it, Timothy.

Don't. This is not the truth entrusted to you. This is not the deposit that God has given the Church of Jesus Christ.

And these kind of people have strayed by professing it. Some have strayed concerning the faith. And so some of this teaching is so bad, it's no longer just idle talk, but it's seriously bad stuff that they are now walking away from the truth of God in Christ.

Again, he doesn't get very specific here. What does that look like? What exactly are they believing that it's become so bad that they're willing to walk away from this glorious gospel of Jesus Christ? Well, it could be a two-fold thing here. Either they have fully apostatized from the gospel, or they're on their way.

They've strayed enough that I'm concerned. Either one is not good. We don't want either one.

And Timothy is, of course, urged in this regard, although not explicitly, but enough here that in his description, when Paul says that these people have been strayed and have strayed away from the truth, it's a bad thing, Timothy. Don't go down that path. Instead, you should, what, guard, preserve, stand upon God's truth so that you don't go down that path that they went down.

He gives some names in chapter 1, as you recall, of a couple of men, Alexandra and others, who have been punished by Paul, explicitly, and by name. I presume they, too, are the ones that had vain and profane and idle babblings. That's why Paul brings it up so many times in his letters.

It's an ongoing problem. And, of course, in guarding the truth, the deposit given to him and to the church, he is also not only preserving himself, he's preserving the church. They see by his rejection of such false teaching and contradictions, it's a dangerous path so go down that way is the idea.

And it's clearly true for all of us, not just Timothy, that we should be weary of such idle babblings and profane and contradictions and false teachings. What does guarding look like? Now, first of all, it is public, in this context, clearly. It is public.

It is the place, there is a place for private admonitions, of course, to guard the truth, to warn people, to explain these things, but this letter is a public letter to a public officer about public matters and you're calling him to deal with this thing not in a cowardly fashion, but with courage. Stand for Jesus Christ. Stand for the gospel.

Stand for the truths here in this letter that I taught you and practice them, of course, in person, at events, etc. Whatever that public venue is is not really relevant. It's stranger today, of course, because part of this public venue includes online and social media, right? It is a public space.

All kinds of people can read it, unless it's clearly private, like they used to have private chat rooms. I suppose they still have them, I don't know. That would be a slightly different matter, but still, when it's public, it's public.

At a Christian class presentation, I think it was a Sunday school class, it's been a long time, they were going over different beliefs and I guess training their members, these Christians, to understand these different beliefs correctly and there's a place for that. Strangely enough, however, they decided to get a Muslim. Not a Christian who converted, but they literally got a Muslim to go before this class and to explain Islam.

And, of course, in explaining it, he wants to say, well, you know, Jesus is one of our prophets because they believe in Jesus, but not Jesus as God, just Jesus as another angel or spiritual, whatever, prophet from the Lord, but not as good as Muhammad. And he made that clear. He wanted to blur that line.

And I'm sitting here, my mouth hanging open, nobody going to say anything? And I asked a question. And, yeah, you bet my question was direct. And the guy didn't like it.

He did a little song and dance. Unfortunately, the Christians weren't comfortable with me doing that. I was a pastor at the time.

I would have done it even if I wasn't a pastor. But Christians, why would they be uncomfortable with that? Don't be uncomfortable with that. You should expect that from your leaders.

This is not the right, this is not the place to present false truths and heresies and lies. So, direct. Well, there you go.

This kind of defense, this guarding of the truth should be public when it's a public matter, and it should be direct. Christ, Paul, Peter, we're all direct. We're just so comfortable reading it.

We weren't actually there. You don't have a lot of descriptions. It's quite interesting the way the Spirit of God wrote the Bible.

He didn't write the way we write stories. We have lots of descriptions, lots of adjectives, explaining all the details of exactly His voice inflection or something. In Hebrew especially, it's just simply He said, He said, He said.

And sometimes that word said, or even the word and, you have different nuances. We may translate that, but it can simply be translated said. There's not a lot of emotion behind the words there.

And so we lose sight of the fact of how blunt, direct, and clear the early church leadership was. In a way, I dare say, we would be quite offended today if our pastors did it. In fact, I've seen it, unfortunately.

Because there's a time for it. When people's souls are on the line, they're in these public venues especially, which is more dangerous insofar as there's more people. There's more influence, and therefore more effect upon the audience with these lies and half-truths.

Half-truths, of course, are the worst. Peter told his audience, he recalled in the great sermon of Pentecost, to repent of murder. Back then, I say back then, but it's becoming this way unfortunately in America.

You can speak to a crowd, and you don't know what you're always going to get. They would drag you off like they did Stephan and stone you. And yet he was direct, clear, and to the point.

You crucified Jesus. Repent. Paul and Peter, Paul's letters as we know.

Reformers and Puritans were blunt. I think we're aware of this. Because a lot of people don't like to read them.

They have that kind of reputation of being dour. So they tie to mischaracterization, which is another word for lie, that labeled dour and down in the mouth and just what is what these Puritans to them as an anchor around their neck. And I think sometimes that's because they were so blunt to the point.

Very much so. Public leaders have a high standard in their call to be clear about what is true and what is false and to stand for that truth, to guard it, to preserve it for the sake of God's people and the glory of God Almighty and Christ Jesus. Now it's especially what we read in the times of Christ, of course.

Who does he most noticeably call out? Public leaders. The Pharisees. The scribes.

To their face. To large crowds of people. The equivalent is being in the same denomination and having a pastor stand up saying, these other pastors in my same denomination are wolves and hypocrites.

You'd be like, what? Peter does a similar thing. Paul does a similar thing in dealing with the Jews who are trying to undermine and steal the sheep of Jesus Christ. Paul was very clear with his own apostle.

Who was that? Peter. What book was that? Galatians. Remember that? What are you doing, Peter? Hanging out with the Gentiles and the Jews come along and you're embarrassed and all of a sudden you act like a Jew? What's your problem? He called him out, a fellow pastor, publicly.

There's a time for that. And I grant you, it can be overdone and young men especially can be very, very zealous and I want that zeal. I want that zeal.

Exercise for the good of the church. So I'm not going to say exactly what should be done in all cases. But I would submit to you that perhaps we need a little more of that.

And it's persistent. It's not only direct. It's not only public.

It's persistent. The issue is severe enough. Paul doesn't let go.

He keeps bringing up these fables in 1 Timothy and in 2 Timothy and again in Titus. Because there was an ongoing problem that was everywhere apparently in all these different churches. These Jewish fables.

Paul wrote an entire book on justification matters. Galatians. And he brought it up again in Romans.

Paul, you sound like a broken record. Paul's probably like, because you're all broken. There's a broken problem.

There's a persistent issue going on in these churches and I'm trying to stamp it out. It's a fire about to consume the body of Christ. What more do you want from your leaders but protection? And you want them to be firemen putting out that fire.

And of course, lastly, it requires knowledge of the times. I mentioned this before that allusion in the Old Testament to the sons of Issachar who were men who knew the times. Who understood what was needed.

And certainly, some pastors are more aware of issues than other pastors. There's varying degrees of ability even within the same ministry. That's true.

And knowledge. But we're all called to keep an ear to the ground that something serious is going to happen in the churches. And that's especially the pastor's call.

He's there full time. What's happening? What needs to be done? What should be avoided in our churches, in our practices, and the like? Because no church or denomination can stay pure forever. It's ongoing work. It requires knowledge, persistence, and dedication.

You Are Called to Help Guard the Faith

Now, lastly, you are called to help guard the faith. What do I mean by that? If you recall the story, the historical event of Moses and Exodus at the battle of the Amalekites.

He goes up on top of a hill. And now Amalek came out and fought with Israel and Rephidim. And Moses said to Joshua, Choose us some men and go out and fight with Amalek.

Tomorrow I'll stand at the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand. He's going to do this as a public symbol that the Lord is with them in their battle. So Joshua did as Moses said to him and fought with the Amalek.

And Moses and Aaron and her went up to the top of the hill. And so it was when Moses held up his hand that Israel prevailed. And when they let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.

But Moses' hands became heavy. And so they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. And Aaron and her supported his hands.

One on one side and the other on the other side. And his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. You, brothers and sisters, can help in this job of protecting and guarding the truth given to the church.

In such a way that frail humans called pastors get the assistance they need. It's two-fold. It's an indirect help and it's a direct help.

By indirect, I mean simply prayer and the like, material support, meaning that the fact that the church is around and the church has funds is kind of helpful for the pastor. Sometimes the greatest obstacle in guarding and helping the church of Jesus Christ, unfortunately, as I suggested earlier in my illustration, and helping them do their job is they undermine the pastor's job. Even pastors and church leaders become uncomfortable when other pastors stand firm and zeal to deal with public dangers to the body of Christ.

And so you need to pray in our denominations and the American churches that there be wisdom on the one hand, of course, for the young, not just young, I'm an older guy, zealous pastors who want to protect the church of Jesus Christ to do so, of course, in a proper fashion at the same time that there would not be tone police. We have tone police. The only word I can think of to describe it.

And I understand that matter, and there's a place for that. There's also not a place for that, and that requires wisdom, brothers and sisters. We need that.

That's indirect. That's a way of positive or negative peer pressure upon the ministry to do or not do the right thing. And we need prayer for that and support for that and encouragement in that regards.

Avoid troublesome teaching yourself. You gotta watch out for yourself. I can't live in your life.

I'm not there with you throughout the week. You too are called to guard your soul, to watch over what you believe and what you bring into your ear and into your eyes. And by God's grace, you can.

You have the spirit of the living God in you. And, of course, encouraging and allowing the pastor, if warranted, to stand firm and to be direct. Let him, as it were, do his job.

Directly, that is, that slides into it. Encouraging him explicitly is one way, of course. They need the encouragement now and then.

And bring concerns to them. Say, I ran across something. Like messengers out on the battlefield.

You find an enemy. I can't see everything. I'm one man.

The session can't see everything. We're a small group of men. And you find something that's quite questionable.

You bring it to us. Hey, I've run across this. Members of our church have been reading this weird kind of book.

What's going on here? And that's why sessions are, try to be careful with what goes in Bible studies that aren't run by the session. That is, directly by the session. Like women's meetings often and the like.

We are concerned that the good stuff is being read and not the bad stuff. And you can help in that regard. Giving helpful advice about specialty topics.

Maybe you never thought about that. Again, the pastor and the session, the church leaders can't know everything about everything about every topic that may be impinging and affecting the church of Jesus Christ. You may have a specialty in some regard that could be helpful in this manner.

My immediate thought, of course, is atheists and knowledge of science and whatnot. But, facts that you've run across that we got wrong, perhaps. Encouraging words and the like, even on social media.

Taking on error yourself. There's a time and place in which you, as an individual Christian, are called to take on error yourself. Like in the family or local matters, you deal with your spouse, you deal with your kids.

Cult members go door to door. What are you going to do? You don't have to answer the door of the cult. Don't bring them in the house is a typical rule, I think.

You're not there to try to take them on. I don't think that's really your call. But if they're there lying to you in front of your kids, you can rebuke them or tell them you're wrong or quote a Bible verse and have a nice day and close the door.

So your kids know there's a difference between the lies. They're very nice lies. They smile at you.

They're very winsome. Kids don't know the difference. So the kids know the difference.

You have this calling. I can't do it for you, brothers and sisters. Maybe invite the pastor over later to talk to the guy.

I don't know. If it's a neighbor, perhaps. I've had that.

That's good. Keep it up. You might ask for advice from the pastor so that you can give the right answer to your family members, your coworkers and the like about a particular topic.

So you have this call to deal with error when it's before you if it's appropriate at the time. Often you can just simply walk away. It's just like, I don't want to be in this situation.

Okay, kids, we're out of here or whatnot. You don't need to make a big scene is what I'm saying. But if it's serious enough in the church with members, a church officer bringing about schismatic problems, you as a member of the body of Christ have responsibility to confront the matter, to bring another officer into the matter and even bring up charges if it gets bad enough.

You're not called to sit there and hold back and say, you know, I'll let the session and the presbytery deal with all these matters. And it may be the case often because I know you're

busy. But sometimes if it's directly and immediately in front of you and impinging upon your church, pastors sitting there preaching blasphemies or whatever, you have to get involved.

I'm sorry. It's not comfortable. I know it's not.

You're quite uncomfortable. But you have a responsibility in that regard to help the church and purify the church and even bring charges if it's bad enough. And of course, prayer and fasting may be involved.

God's grace, brother, sister, we know, is needed in all things. The task of guarding the truth as a difficult job requires courage and perseverance, attention and motivation. It's true for pastors and laymen alike.

And above all, this task requires a spirit of grace and power and wisdom. In a day of growing apostasy, of questioning God's truth, even within the church of Jesus Christ, pray and work to the end that more pastors will stand in the gap to guard the truth and guard the flock, protect them as watchmen on the tower. Amen.

Let us pray. Our Lord and Savior, You did not leave us to our own devices. You knew that we were busy.

We have a job. We have families. But Lord, You, in Your kindness, gave us pastors whose full-time job is to protect, to feed, to study the Word of God and to think of how best it applies and how best to defend Your truth and the flock of Jesus Christ.

Help unto that end. Help all of us, Lord, to gather and rally around the truth and to preserve and encourage one another in this regard, God Almighty, to always walk and follow Jesus. And having done all, to stand, we pray, by the blood of Christ.

Amen.