



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

1 Timothy 4: 1-10

“Laboring and Striving”

1 Timothy

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we thank you for the time we have together again this evening when we can read the scriptures together, and then, spend some time consider their meaning. We pray that as we do that, you'd bless us, that you would guide us in our thinking. What a blessing it is and a blessing beyond our comprehension that we are not alone in this effort to understand your word, but we have the author who lives within us, who literally dwells within our hearts; the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. And we pray that we would be submissive to his instruction and his guidance in our thinking, and that we would be blessed as a result of that. Open our hearts to receive his ministry and we pray that as he teaches us we would not only understand the meaning of the text, but the various ways in which it applies to us.

We cannot offer applications that will address every individual in attendance, but the Spirit of God knows our condition far better than we ourselves know our own conditions and he can direct us, and open our minds, and give us insight into our needs. And we pray that he would do that and that we would be receptive to his ministry. Bless us Lord as we turn our attention to the scriptures. May we honor you in the way we think and the way we approach them, and may our time together be helpful to all of us. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] The text is 1 Timothy 4:1-10. "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is

good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer. In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following. But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance. For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers."

If you read the Bible at all, and not even very carefully, you can't help but notice that there are lots of wars and conflicts, particularly in the Old Testament. The patriarchs struggle with enemies and famines. The children of Israel labored in slavery, then they entered Canaan fighting wars. Kings of Israel were always fighting someone; Philistines, Syrians, Babylonians. The reason that that is in the Bible and we have so much conflict, so much violence, so many wars is because it's history, and the Bible gives a true account of what happened.

We have reliable history in both the Old and the New Testaments. But it is also there for spiritual instruction. All of that we see in the Old Testament, the conflicts that we see there, the difficulties that we see so often are there as a kind of type. Paul indicates that in 1 Corinthians 10 in verse 11. He says that all of that happened for our instruction. There's a pattern there that gives us an illustration, an instruction about life and it tells us very clearly that the life of God's people in this world is one of labor, struggle, and warfare.

God's not called us to an easy, comfortable life. He may give that to us at times and give us an abundance of ease and comfort. That's not what he's called us to. Paul often uses metaphors to describe the nature of the Christian life, which are very vivid and bring out that nature very clearly with descriptions of the athlete and the soldier. That describes the Christian experience and we have that here in our text; verse 10.

"It is for this we labor and strive." Paul begins the chapter warning of conflict with apostates. It is a return to the warning that he gave back in chapter 1 against false teachers. He paused in chapters 2 and 3 to give instruction on correct conduct in the house of God and to declare the greatness of Jesus Christ in chapter 3, verses 15 and 16. But now he returns to this warning that he gave earlier against false teaching, teaching and men who would endanger the church.

Verse 1: "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons." We have a saying and that is that to be forewarned is to be forearmed, and the Lord never leaves his people unarmed. He gives warnings and he gave warnings in the past to alert the church to future dangers. The Holy Spirit gave this prophetic warning, as Paul says, explicitly and in very specific terms.

Now, Paul doesn't give us a reference to that warning, to the explicit statement that the Spirit gave. It may be one that he gave to Paul. It may be one that he gave to the Lord Jesus Christ in the statements that he made. In fact, we have statements that would address the problem that Paul is speaking of here very clearly in Mark 13 in verse 22. The Lord spoke about the future and the dangers that would come; physical dangers, but spiritual danger as well. And there, in what is known as the Olivet discourse, he spoke of future things and the Lord said that in those times false Christs and false prophets will arise. People who claim to be Christ. People who claim to be the messiah. People who claim to be the savior. They would come on the scene and false prophets would come on the scene as well.

So the Lord warned of that and Paul himself spoke of a great apostasy, and the man of sin, and the last days. He speaks of that in 2 Thessalonians 2, verse 3 and verse 11. Falling away from the faith is apostasy. It's turning from the truth. It's denying the Gospel. A true believer can never do that. We cannot apostatize, but people who are associated with the truth, people who at one time may have professed faith in orthodoxy who had claimed to believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, perhaps even preached, can at a point in time come to a new decision about all of that and turn from it. Not because they truly believe, and then, they fell from the faith or turned away from it, but because they never truly believed it.

John speaks of people like that in 1 John. He says they went out from us because they were not really of us. He means they apostatized because they never truly believed. They were never really one of us, but they were in our midst and they were among us. And this was a problem that the church has and will have in the future. There will occur a large scale apostasy in latter times.

It's an epic that will occur subsequent to Paul's time. Paul doesn't know when that is. It could happen, from his perspective, in Timothy's day, or at a later date in his own life. But that was the future and that was going to happen. But Paul also saw that danger, the danger that will occur in those future days as being already at work in his own day, already at work within the church of Ephesus.

So what will occur in the future in an intensive kind of way was occurring now in Paul's day. It's occurring now in our day. It occurs in every generation. There is apostasy. There is turning from the truth. I think we see this kind of explanation of the future and the present, this connection between the two in 1 John 4 in verses 1 through 3, where John talks about the future and the man of sin or the antichrist, as he describes him.

He says, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit." This is very similar to what Paul is talking about in our text. " But test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world."

So antichrist is coming, but his spirit is already here. It is present in everyone who denies the Gospel. That way of thinking. That attitude. That approach to the truth. Paul doesn't speak here of the spirit of the antichrist, but he does write of the deceitful spirits to whom the false teachers pay attention, to whom they devote themselves. Unwittingly, but nevertheless, they're paying attention to deceitful spirits and being led astray; led into false doctrine.

They also give attention to the doctrines of demons. That is, the doctrines that are taught by demons. The doctrines that issue from demons, that are satanically inspired. These are the same as those deceiving spirits. They're one and the same and they have captured the minds of these people. So it is through demonic influence that men are drawn away from orthodoxy if they've associated with it.

If they have had been a part of the assembly and had given affirmation of believe in it, but then moved away from that, it's because they were drawn away by demonic influences and drawn from orthodoxy from truth into error. But the demons don't act apart from the agency of men and these men cannot be excused because they've been deceived. The demons act in conjunction with these men, and in verse 2, they are seen to be in collusion with them, no doubt unwittingly, not realizing that they are coming under the influence of these demons. But still, the demons operate through men who are willing recipients of the deception. They operate by means of the hypocrisy of liars.

So the demons find willing allies in these men who are described as hypocrites, described as liars. They teach rigorous ethical standards, which they themselves don't live up to. They're hypocrites. In addition, their own consciences have been seared as with a branding iron,

which may mean either that they have Satan's mark of ownership on their souls. Some have taken it that way and there's some support for that because they are agents of the devil. These are agents of these satanic spirits. And so, their allegiance is to that of Satan and his minions.

So that's possible, or it could mean that they have become insensitive to right and wrong. Their consciences have been, in effect, burned or cauterized by sin and falsehood, by the error that they've taught. It's seared them to what is right and what is good, so that their consciences are like scar tissue, which is unfeeling. And so, they're insensitive to truth. They're insensitive to sin. Sin does that. It has that effect upon a person. It makes one insensitive to that which is Holy, and that which is right, and that which is good.

Paul speaks similarly to this in Ephesians 4 in verse 19 where he writes of those who have become callous because they have given themselves over to sensuality. It may be a crucial decision that a person makes at a time in his or her life to go into that kind of a life, but once that step is taken, it becomes a slippery slope and it's much easier to participate in a sin the next time and the next time. And pretty soon, it becomes a way of life in which they're not disturbed. Their conscience doesn't bother them. They've become insensitive, callous to it.

That is, I think, the case with these men. They're insensitive to the truth. They're insensitive to right and wrong. They're callous to that which is good and that which is pure. Their false teaching has two notable prohibitions that Paul cites. That against marriage and that against food, which may refer to the beginning form of Gnosticism, which wasn't in full flower until the second century. That heresy, which became very significant in a later generation from when Paul was writing is a system of thought that was based on a dualistic view of the world. It was very Greek in its orientation.

It believed that spirit is good and matter is evil. The body is evil. The body, some of the Greeks thought, was like a prison and it held the soul. And what a person wants, the ideal, is to be freed from the material, be freed from the body and be pure spirit. And so, among the Gnostics, there was this few that the religious man should do his best to emancipate himself from the physical, from the material, from the body. And so, everything that was material was evil. But even if that is the case with this heresy that had arisen within the church in these men, I think that it is mainly a Jewish heresy; Jewish in nature. The false teachers may have been men who were converted out of Judaism with Greek tendencies.

There are similarities to this in other Jewish circles of that day. Josephus, for example, speaks of the Essenes. The Qumran community, that cult that was down around the Dead Sea

that gave us the Dead Sea Scrolls, they had ideas that were similar to this. They rejected marriage. They lived ascetic lives. But in Asia Minor there was a lot of this. It was a kind of melting pot of ideas in the ancient world and Judaism in that region tended to be, at least in some places, synchronistic. That is, it blended ideas, the ideas of the Greeks with the idea of Judaism, and the ideas of the Bible. It combined them and that may be what we have here; this kind of combination of Greek ideas, what would become Gnostic later on, and ideas of Judaism. Dietary laws, for example.

Some of these ideas, which if we were to go into, would seem rather strange to us. Very foreign to our way of thinking today. Some of these ideas though are not all that arcane and are not all that uncommon in our own day because we too have our list of don'ts, our taboos, things that the Bible doesn't explicitly prescribe, but that Christians tend to make into things that we can't do, participate in, or partake of.

One of the commentators described this heresy as teetotalism and to bring it up to date and give a sense of the contemporary aspects of it. Well, against this asceticism, this legalism, this denial of food and marriage, Paul argues in verse 3 that these ideas are against the divine ordinance. What they forbid, Paul writes, God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. God made the very things that they deny. He established the institutions that they deny. He made food and drink to be enjoyed gratefully and thankfully.

The attitude that a person has toward the things of this world, as one of the commentators has pointed out, in fact, a couple of the commentators have pointed this out, that the attitude that a person has toward the things of this world, the natural things of this world reflects that person's conception of God. Whether God is a grudging God or a generous God. Paul's teaching is that the things of this world evidence that God is good and that his presence is constantly with us. He's not a God who has created an abundance of things, and then, says, "You can't have any of it."

He's generous. He's created much. The world produces in abundance every year and doesn't hold that back from us. He doesn't declare it bad. He declares it good. And Paul indicates that in verse 4 where he states that the things of this world are reasons for being thankful. "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude." The point is that what God creates must be good because God is good. And Paul may be thinking here of Genesis 1, the account of creation, and you know that throughout that chapter God looks upon the various phases of creation and he says, "It is good. It is good."

And then, you come down to the end in verse 31 of chapter 1, he looks at the whole of creation. Man is now in it and he says, "It's very good."

Nothing that he created is bad. It's all very good. So Paul looks at creation and he says, in effect, it's all kosher. Everything's good. There are no restrictions. Now, that doesn't mean it's wrong to restrict ourselves. At times we should do that for health reasons and for moral reasons. Sometimes we should abstain from doing things or partaking of certain things, food or drink, if it's going to be an offense to another person or it's going to perhaps have the possibility of compromising our testimony.

So there are times when we should restrict ourselves, as I say, for health reasons or for moral reasons, but there's nothing inherently good in restricting ourselves. There's nothing inherently spiritually in doing that. In fact, very evil people have lived ascetic lives. Julian the apostate, who persecuted the church. Richard Wagner, who was an anti-Semite, and Hitler. They were all vegetarians.

The cults have exhibited these same kind of tendencies. Mormonism rejects alcohol and caffeine. Seventh-Day Adventism has dietary restrictions. God does not forbid eating meat. He doesn't forbid drinking wine. It always brought puzzle to me why people are so concerned about wine when our Lord created it with his first miracle, but nevertheless, that is a concern for a lot of people.

The Bible doesn't forbid these things and we see that not only Genesis 1, where God said everything's good, then we go to Acts 10 in the scene on the housetop in Joppa where the vision occurs for Peter, and God there declares everything to be clean. All foods are clean. Stuff that you and I wouldn't want to eat. Peter should didn't want to eat it, but God says it's clean. It's legitimate.

What is important, I think, in dealing with this issue of food and whatever else it is that we partake of is not can we partake of it, but how do we partake of it? How do we eat or drink? What we do is to be done to the glory of God. Paul makes that very clear in 1 Corinthians 10:31. We do it all to the glory of God. From the most mundane things in life to the greatest, all is to be done to the glory of God.

So how we eat or drink is to be done in a way that glorifies God. Now, that may imply and that certainly does imply, I think, prohibition on certain things. It implies that we don't overindulge in anything and we never abuse the things of this world. We use them rightly and properly. Paul writes that it is to be enjoyed with gratitude and what thanksgiving. That's giving

glory to God. That's thanking God for the abundance that he's giving. Enjoying it to his glory, being pleased with what he's given.

I don't think it's all pleasing to God to look at something that's good that he's given and say it's bad. We're to enjoy it with gratitude, Paul says. This is why we pray before a meal, as Paul explains in verse 5. "For it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer." We approach the meals that we have every day with thanksgiving. We pray. Verbally, we give thanks to God for what he's given to us. And hopefully it's not a rote kind of prayer that we fall into, which is very easy to do, but it comes from the heart because we really understand that this is a gift from God.

It's a good passage to reflect upon whenever we approach the meal, whatever meal we approach that comes from a good God to be enjoyed and he has provided it for us. He's given you the hand to hold the fork, to take up the food. He's giving you everything that you have and we should be thankful.

Well, that exposes the false ideas and the problems that Timothy would face. And now, in the next verses, Paul gives Timothy some personal advice and encouragement. Paul first tells him to point these things out, the things that he has just written to the brethren. Verse 6: "In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following."

That statement pointing out is a word that means something like suggest to the brethren. It's a milder way of addressing the problem. He's not to come on too strong evidently, rebuke, and denounce in strong word, but instead, Timothy's to give advice. He is to point things out.

So young Timothy was to give the warning, but in a tactful way. But he's still to give the warning. He's not to shy away from confronting the problem, but he's to be tactful in the way that he does it. And the way to prepare himself to do that is stated in the second half of the verse. It is being "constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following."

In other words, by constantly studying the scriptures. Studying the doctrines of the faith. And that word faith has the article in the Greek text and it points to the body of doctrine, not personal faith, but the doctrines of the Christian faith. And he's to be studying that and to be doing it constantly. That's the sense. I don't know what text you're reading, but in the New American Standard, they have the word constantly in italics. That's the sense of participle there. It is of present tense. It's constantly to be nourishing himself on these things.

So he's being doing that and he had been doing that before Paul ever wrote. He's to continue doing that to constantly be nourishing himself on the things of God. That involves diligent study, following these doctrines, he says. That can be taken in different ways, but I think that the idea of that word following here is that of investigating. Following up on the things that he's studying.

I say that because it's the word that Luke uses in Luke 1 in verse 3 and that's his idea of investigating these things that he has written in the Gospel of Luke and that he wrote in the book of Acts. And so, Timothy is to be doing that, following through on all these doctrines. Investigating them. Studying them thoroughly. That is what a teacher in the church is to be doing. The man who teaches, a person who teaches in the church is to be a constant student of the word of God. Now, we're all to be that, but some of us don't have the opportunities to study as much as others do. Some of us have to go to work in a secular workplace and have to find time in the evening or early in the morning to do that.

We're all to be doing that, but certainly a man in Timothy's position and one, such as a teaching elder in a church is to spend his time studying; learning. Knowing the doctrines of the word of God, the whole counsel of God, knowing the word of God so that it will be known certainly and profoundly, and so, that he or she will be able to use it effectively in the church, and be effective in using it. Because not only do we know the word, in order to be able to use the word in confronting error and in terms of encouraging and building up the body with the truth positively, but also through the study of the word, the person who teaches it, the agent of the word, is made effective in using it. Sanctified and build up in the faith.

And so, Timothy's to know the word of God. He's to know the truth. He's to be nourished on it, to use it. Donald Guthrie in his commentary wrote that, "The best refutation of error is a positive presentation of the truth is a principle the church in every age constantly needs to learn." That's a good point.

We do need to rebuke. We do need to take the negative position, but I think he's write that the very best way to refute error is to give the truth. It's like knowing the difference between real money and counterfeit money. I'm told, I've heard the illustration many times, I think I heard this in a barn house sermon, but it sounds true to me that the best way, or the people that can best detect counterfeit money are those who are very familiar with real currency. What's true. What's right. And so, they know what real currency looks like or feels like and when something doesn't match that feel or sight, they're able to recognize it as being counterfeit.

Truth, knowing the truth is the best guard and defense against error and truth is a powerful force. It pushes out error certainly in the hearts of the faithful. In contrast to sound doctrine or good doctrine, Paul tells Timothy what to avoid. In verses 7 and 8, he says, "Have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women." Instead of giving attention to teachings that are wrong, have no value, Timothy is to discipline himself for Godliness, Paul says.

The word discipline is the word from which we get gymnasium, and as Paul often does in his writings, he borrows from the athletic realm to convey his point. The image of the athlete in rigorous training gives expression to the discipline which Paul was urging on Timothy. Athletes in that day were known for rigorous training. They're known for that in our day. If they're going to be a successful athlete, they train constantly. They're always working out. They're always training their bodies for that.

But Timothy should be far more devoted to his training than the athlete is to his because while physical discipline profits, it only profits a little, Paul says. It only profits for a short period of time and even if it were to profit physically for the athlete's entire life, that life ends, and then, the discipline and the profit comes to an end, while spiritual training is profitable for all things in a person's life and for all time. It's profitable for the present. It's profitable for eternity. That's what Paul states at the end of verse 8.

Paul calls his advice in verse 8 a trustworthy statement. That's what he says in verse 9. So I take the statement of verse 9 to be reflecting back on verse 8 and he supports that in verse 10 where he explain why it's a reliable statement and why spiritual discipline is of eternal benefit. "It is for this," he writes, meaning for this promise of life or time in eternity that he spoke of in verse 8, that "we labor and strive." And the reason we will succeed in our labor and striving is because our hope is fixed on the living God. He will not disappoint.

These words, labor and strive, describe what the Christian life ought to be and they suggest strenuous toil. They suggest fatigue-producing effort of the kind that an athlete exerts. Well, that's the Christian life. Is that true of you? That's what I have to ask myself as I approach this. Sitting there today, working on this, typing these things up, thinking about them, I said, "Wait a minute. Is that my life?" Because I've just put down that this is the Christian life and I believe it is. I think this is exactly what Paul is saying to Timothy.

This is the way we live our lives. This is how we're to conduct ourselves. We're to be pursuing Godliness and living for the hope of the future in a way that calls forth from us fatigue-

producing effort. A very strictly disciplined life, and I confess, I'm a little uncomfortable with that because this is a very, very high standard. I don't always meet that. I don't know that I come close to meeting what Paul is talking about here and what I think Timothy followed as well, but I think Paul did meet it. I think this was typical of his life. I think he could give this kind of instruction to Timothy because he lived it out himself.

Turn over to 1 Corinthians 9 and we have an example of Paul's life. This is how he lived his life. At the end of that chapter, 1 Corinthians 9, beginning with verse 24, "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore, I run in such a way as not without aim, I box in such a way as not beating the air, but I discipline my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified."

Now, that's a disciplined life. That's a rigorous kind of life. Everything was scrutinized by Paul. Wasn't an easy, comfortable, leisurely life that Paul lived. If Paul and Timothy were with us today, I wonder how much time they'd spend watching television. I don't think Paul would say, "Don't own a television." He might say. He might say, "What good is on television?" but I don't think that he would say that. I do think he would probably say something like, "I have much more interesting things to do than watch television or watch much television." He might say, "I just don't have time to watch it." Where do you find the time to watch television when there's so many other things to do, like study the word of God and redeem the time?

Paul didn't disparage the pleasures of this life and I think that's clear from what he's already written in counter to what the false teachers were advocating. There is a place for the pleasures of life. He said we're to receive the good things of this world, the good things from the hand of God with gratitude. But Paul and Timothy were ready to part with the permitted pleasures of life, those which are legitimate pleasures in life, and do so in order to engage in the struggle of life for something far greater. To become what the Scot Patrick Fairbairn called "partakers of life in that higher and nobler sense which the grace of God and Christ had rendered possible for them to attain."

For the most part, the world lives on a different level from the level that the Christian does or should live on. The world lives a kind of animal existence. It lives to satisfy bodily appetites. This is particularly true in our day. And not altogether, you can find exceptions to

this in our day and in every age with asceticism and that kind of thing, but for the most part, I think in a worldly society like ours what we see is people living for leisure and pleasure, as though that's the highest good.

Well, God has called us to something far greater and more fulfilling. And so, we are to be laboring and striving. That's the kind of life we're to live. The goal is eternal blessing and that blessing doesn't begin with death. It begins now. We have blessing now that we receive through our laboring and striving, but it can't compare to what's to come and what's forever.

So we're to be living in that way, but the encouragement to do that and the life that is described here, what Paul is urging Timothy to do is not easy, again. It's difficult. It's labor. It's striving. It's battling. It's confronting the enemy constantly. The encouragement though to do that, to struggle on, is our hope because, Paul writes, "we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers."

Paul's confidence was grounded in a person who could not fail; the living God. He is that, he is the living God because he's real. He's alive. He's not like the gods of this world, which don't really exist. God Almighty is God. He's the true God. And because he is God, he's the source of life. He's the source of strength. And he's the source of it in abundance. What he gives is absolutely sufficient and it's more than sufficient.

We speak of the sufficiency of scripture. We speak of the sufficiency of the life that he gives us. We don't mean it's just enough. It's just sufficient. It's sufficient in abundance and he is our sufficiency. And so, he can be relied upon to give us the strength to struggle on and to bring us safely into the life to come that we look forward to.

I've heard interviews with athletes, in fact, I heard this recently, and they spoke of their pride, and spoke of their complete confidence in their own abilities, and their training to beat anyone they competed against. Whenever one of them said he stepped out on the track, he was convinced that he was going to beat everyone there. Whenever he stepped onto the basketball court, one of them said, he was confident that he was the best. And that's how good athletes compete and that confidence helped them in their competition. It helped them to win.

People who lack confidence and are timid usually don't prevail in a contest, whether it's an athletic contest or if it's contests of business, of selling, whether it's a war, a battle. If you're not confident, if you're timid, if you're not sure of yourself, you're not likely to succeed. Well, Paul had great confidence, but his confidence wasn't in his own abilities or his own strength and his own effort. He knew he had abilities. I'm sure that Paul knew he was very intelligent. I'm

sure Paul knew that he had greater knowledge of the scriptures than the Jewish men that he debated, and he certainly knew he had a greater knowledge of God than the men of Athens when he spoke to them. He knew that he had a good mind. He must've known he had all these things, and he had confidence, and he didn't shy away from doing what he had to do.

I think he must've been a bold man and had great confidence. Timothy seems to have been a timid kind of man. Paul had confidence, but he didn't have confidence in himself. He knew that his abilities were a gift from God and he had confidence in the God who'd given them. And so, his confidence is in him. It's not in his talents. It was not in his self-discipline. It was in the living God who doesn't disappoint those who put their trust in him and obey.

So Paul could tell the Philippians in Philippians 2, verses 12 and 13 to work out their salvation because God was at work in them, both to will and to do according to his good pleasure. So they could work out the virtues of the Christian life. They could be obedient. They could do all that they were to do and they could do it because God was in them working to produce all of that, to enable them to achieve and to succeed.

Well, what Paul says of the living God is that he is the savior of all men, especially of believers. That is what he is and that is what he does as the living God. And Paul writes that of him in order to encourage Timothy to further confidence in his laboring and his striving after Godliness and the eternal goal. That description is not a support for any form of universalism. Paul is not teaching that everyone will be saved. God is the savior of all men. That's not the sense of that statement and the Bible doesn't teach that. We know that.

If that was the idea, it would make the statement, especially of believers completely unnecessary. Obviously, if he's the savior of all men, that is, in the sense that every one without exception's going to be saved, then it makes no sense to add especially believers. Well, of course, everybody. The fact that Paul added that would indicate that's not his meaning, but we know that's not his meaning from other portions of scripture as well. And Paul is not teaching that God is potentially the savior of all and actually the savior of believers. That is a popular view today.

That is what those who hold to the so-called doctrine of unlimited atonement would advocate, which is a complete misnomer. It's not unlimited in any sense. It's limited in every sense in its extent. It's limited to a finite number people and it's limited in its power. It doesn't save anyone. But the idea of that interpretation of this text is that God wants every person to be saved and he has provided for that salvation of every single individual without exception. There,

who was already in hell when Christ died, and Judas, who is the son of perdition who Peter said went to his place, provided for them salvation, and for the antichrist and the false prophet who will be cast into the lake of fire, according to this view, Christ died to provide salvation for them. So he's potentially the savior of all if they'll have him as their savior.

He's there to be their savior if they believe, but if they don't, then of course, he's just potentially their savior, but he is actually especially the savior of believers because they're actually saved. But God is said here to be the savior of all. He's not said to be the potential savior of all. He's said to be the savior, in some degree, what Paul is saying here in making this absolutely statement – it's not a potential statement, it's an absolute statement, not hypothetical, but actual – he is saying, in some degree, he is the savior of all men. He is in some degree, and in the same sense, the savior of those who believe and those who don't believe. And so, it cannot be said that some men are spiritually saved to some degree while not completely saved.

Well, even people who people who hold the unlimited atonement recognize that that's not Paul's point, that he's not teaching salvation here. He's not teaching atonement. I think Donald Guthrie has given a good interpretation of this and explaining the word savior. And here, it's to be understood as preserver. This is not a description of Christ. It's a description of the Father and he is the preserver of all. And sometimes the Bible does use, in the Old Testament and the New Testament, this expression of salvation in the sense of preservation. And you might look at Psalm 36 in verse 11. It uses that in that way. He's the savior of man, the preserver of man and beast.

Well, the Greeks, or the ancients, the Romans and the Greeks used this word savior, *soter*, the Greek word, of their gods. They used it of the Roman emperor. They used it of leading officials because they were viewed as saving in the sense that they provided for people's physical needs and they delivered from calamity. And so, Paul is using this word of the living God saying that he is the savior of all men in the sense that he's the one who really does it. He's the one who provides life, provides protection for all men, everyone. Every single individual who lives in preserved in life and provided for in life, and often delivered in life by the Lord God, whether they realize it or not.

This is what Paul told the men of Athens, you remember, in Act 17 in his sermon on the unknown God. He is the one who gives to all people live and breath and all things. That's verse 25 of chapter 17. Verse 28, it's in him that we live and move and exist. So he preserves us. He is the one who is the provider of all men. That's Paul's idea here. He's not speaking of God

saving men spiritually, but rather, as preserving them. But as Paul tells Timothy, he is especially that for believers. God gives special care for us. And that should've been a great encouragement to Timothy as he labored to served him. God would preserve him from danger as he was facing danger, and hostility, and all kinds of incriminations from these people. But he would preserve him from danger, and preserve him from error, and preserve those he warned and taught.

So he is to go forward with great confidence because God, who is the savior of all men and especially of believers is with him. It should've been a great comfort to him. It should be a great comfort to all of us as we think about that because if the one who takes care of the sparrows and the unbelievers does that for them, well, what's he going to do for us? Certainly he'll take care of us and preserve us.

So we can labor, and strive, and serve him knowing that he will protect and provide for us. And we can go forward with that confidence and know that we will, by obedience in this life, regardless of what stands against us, regardless of the circumstances, by striving and laboring, we will obtain the greatest of blessings in this life and infinite blessing beyond in the life to come. So may God give us the desire to do that, the discipline to do that, to be constantly working to do that. Let's close with a word of prayer and seek that from him.

[Prayer] Father, we do seek your blessing on our lives and we seek to have hearts that have the same desires that Paul had and Timothy had in what Paul counsels for Timothy, but what he counsels all of us to do, and that's labor and strive to be disciplined. It's not easy. It's very difficult. It goes against our nature, but you've given us new natures, new hearts, and we pray that by the power of the Spirit of God, we would become increasingly disciplined, dedicated individuals in your service, and we pray that in Christ's name. Amen.