

Kramer Chapel
Concordia Theological Seminary
Feast Day of St. Timothy (2025-01-24)
1 Timothy 6:11-16
Dr. Todd A. Peperkorn

TITLE: "Fight...with Gentleness"

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text today is from 1 Timothy chapter 6:1-12.

One of the most enjoyable things, at least for me, about being on the faculty here is this wintertime tradition. Not Symposium—although that's great, obviously. No, this is the wintertime tradition known as theological interviews. This is kind of a unique tradition in our circles, at least in the Missouri Synod, where two of the professors gather with all of the fourth-year students, one at a time, and discuss theology with them for about an hour. I don't know if my colleagues enjoy this as much as I do. I think it's great. I'll tell you about my TI some other time. I don't think the students enjoy it quite as much as we do. Sometimes I firmly believe that we have a lot more confidence in their good confession than they do when they are going through this little exercise.

But these students don't know something that we know—that the entire life of the pastor is one constant theological interview. The whole thing. Your words, your conduct, how you carry yourself, how people see you—all of it is the lens of the church looking upon this man. Now, if that doesn't make you nervous, I don't know what's wrong with you. This is why, in Paul's words to Timothy here—this young pastor, this new pastor in Ephesus, his son in the faith, his colleague on his travels—his encouragement and his words are remarkably strong. Paul uses words like "flee," "pursue," "fight," "take hold," "charge," and "keep." This language is not the language of softness. This is not the language that says, "Well, you'll be fine. Don't worry about it." This is the language of an elder pastor speaking to his young son in the faith, who knows what's at stake. The very souls of God's people are at stake. And these words—this life, this good confession, as St. Paul calls it—they matter.

Paul says a little bit earlier on in Timothy, "Do not be hasty with the laying on of hands." So, the process of preparing, training, and forming pastors is not something that just happens with a snap. You don't just get a warm feeling in your heart that God wants you to be a pastor, and then turn around and start preaching. It involves much fear and trepidation. Paul, too, uses this strong language, and I dare say almost battle language, warrior language, really, quite often. Think of Paul's words to the church in Ephesus: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood . . . Put on the whole armor of God."

Yet, when it comes down to the virtues that Timothy is to embody as a pastor, we see a slightly different picture. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, and gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith . . . with gentleness. I don't get it. These words do not gel. They

do not naturally jive or make sense to us today. In our world, these two things are contrary. You either fight or you're gentle. You're either strong or you are weak. It's one or the other. You can't have both. Tell Jesus. For in our Lord, we find strength in weakness, confidence in the good confession before Pilate, even in the face of hardship. We find St. Paul encouraging young Timothy not to allow his youth to deter him from his good confession. We find Paul speaking over and over and over again to boast in Christ and not in yourself.

The church at Ephesus clearly was in the midst of no little controversy. We don't know exactly what the context was for Timothy's good confession that Paul encourages him in and reminds him of. I'm enough of a Fort Wayne guy to think it was probably Timothy's ordination, but we don't know that for certain. These two things that make the good confession of Timothy, Paul finally brings home in our Lord Jesus Christ, who made the good confession before Pontius Pilate, who, when He suffered, opened not His mouth. This confession—this speaking this same word together—is who our Lord is: the Word made flesh. And for that, He was crucified, died, and rose again for our justification.

There is no contradiction between the good fight of faith and for this to be done with gentleness. Any father should know this: that to be strong for your children, for your wife, for your family, sometimes means to be gentle. Maybe always. It's worth thinking about. And if this is so for my own family, how much more so is this the case for the family of God? That when we care for, preach, make the good confession, and fight the good fight of faith, we do so not because our people are our enemies. For, as Paul said, we wrestle not against flesh and blood. It is Satan who is the enemy. And we make this good confession for the sake of those who are entrusted to our care.

So what about you, O man of God, who wrestles not against flesh and blood? Paul says again to Timothy, "Keep a close watch on yourself and on your teaching." This calls us to recognize our own sins and bring us to repentance and faith. It calls us to continually go to the font, which is the Scriptures, to learn from Him and to give out the life-giving word of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. As we hear earlier in Timothy, "The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." That is what Paul charged Timothy to do and to be. That is what our Lord calls you to this day and every day.

It is a great and mighty thing that our Lord has entrusted to us. It is not something we can do of our own strength and power. But God is relentless in His mercy toward us, His children. His love knows no end. He will form you into the image of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Believe it, for Jesus' sake. Amen.