

Defending the Faith Prelude  
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Today Larry, as I said earlier, is down visiting his grandchild. And so he asked if I could go ahead and deliver the sermon today; or perhaps, rather, it should be “other duties as assigned”—that last bullet of my job description. Maybe it wasn’t asking so much. No...but he’s down visiting grandchildren, or grandchild, and so he asked if I would go ahead and kind of give what could be considered a prelude, or a preview, for what we’re going to be going into this summer. Ok? So if you’re here today you are getting to get a sneak peek into what the sermon series is going to be this summer. Next week Larry will come back and pick up in the book of Acts, and finish us out for the book of Acts in the next few weeks here.

But today we’re going to be looking at 2 Timothy 2:22-26. And this summer series that we’re going to be getting into...it’s a series of sermons that we’ll go through that is intended to help us understand how to biblically defend our faith. That’s the whole intent of it. And so we have one simple goal for the congregation in this series, and it’s just that—that we would know, that we would have a biblical model for how we are to defend our faith against the challenges that come against it. Notice I do not say ‘the people who come against it.’ And we’ll explain a little bit more. See, because a biblical defense of the faith does not mean that we defend ourselves against people. Our battle is not against flesh and blood; it’s against spiritual forces that hold people in bondage. And so that’s what we’re going to look at.

And in particular we’d like to have a passage that we can grasp. This is something where, in the next days, weeks, months ahead, that if we have a question about ‘now how am I supposed to defend my faith’ we have a passage that we can go back to and look at and say, ‘That’s right. This is how I’m supposed to do it,’ and also that we would have a model to follow—ideally, the thought processes here...not only that we give you a passage, but we’re going to be talking through some difficult, potentially divisive, and oftentimes combative things...is how they can seem in our society. The simple fact that if you claim that there is truth, a lot of times that can become a combative conversation. But that’s not what we want. We don’t want to be combative, and so the ideal is that, hopefully, we’ll have a passage that you can grasp and look at, but also that there would be a model, an example, that you can follow of how, in our tone, in our manner, we can talk through difficult things and disagree with people with respect. And so that’s what we’re going to do.

But we’ll start off by looking at 2 Timothy 2. And just leading up to this 2 Timothy is a letter written by Paul the apostle. And he is near the end of his life; he knows that he is about to be martyred, and so he is sending one last little bit of information, advice, insight, wisdom, guidance to his protégé, Timothy. And so he’s been going through here, and the verses preceding this immediate passage he’s explaining that, ‘Timothy, you need to defend the truth. You need to stand and fight for the truth.’ But then he goes in, and he explains part of how this is to be done. And in verse 22 he says,

*Flee from youthful passions, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. But reject foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they breed quarrels. The Lord’s servant must not quarrel, but must be gentle to everyone, able to teach, and patient, instructing his opponents with gentleness. Perhaps God will grant them repentance to know the truth. Then they may come to their senses and escape the devil’s trap, having been captured by him to do his will.*

Paul outlines to Timothy here, in brief, how it is that Timothy is supposed to interact, and how he’s supposed to determine what is worth fighting for, what is a hill to die on, what isn’t, how do I go about doing that defense of the faith, how do I do this. Paul explains some of that in this passage.

First thing we see is this—Paul tells Timothy that he’s to reject foolish disputes. Don’t get into silly arguments, ok? He says instead what we’re to do is we’re to pursue righteousness, love, faith, peace...we’re to pursue peace. And we reject foolish and ignorant disputes. One quick thing that I would point out here is Paul is not saying ‘Do not defend the faith.’ He’s not saying ‘Do not disagree with people.’ He’s not saying ‘Do not dispute.’ What he’s saying is you avoid foolish, ignorant, silly disputes that just breed quarrels where they’re pointless.

So the question that naturally would come up is this...well, what are foolish disputes? What sorts of things does Paul have in mind here? And the first one that I think of is what you could call pointless family disputes. Ok, these are between believers, people who are a part of the family of God, who are believers, who are part of the body of Christ. And Paul says, 'Listen, these sort of disputes, they only serve to divide and bring division within the body of Christ. And so we need to avoid those sorts of disputes.'

Well, what are these sorts of disputes? Well, first of all, we need to explain what it's not. You see, Paul says a very qualifying thing here—'Pursue righteousness, love, faith, peace along with those who are seeking after God with a pure heart.' There's this element of 'Listen, we need to have a unity, and we need to make sure that division does not come between those of us who can agree on matters of first importance...who God is, who Christ is, the fact that Jesus Christ came and He lived a sinless life, and He died a death He did not deserve in my place, He was risen again, and He is going to come again. Salvation comes through Him and Him alone.' Those sort of items are things that Paul identifies as matters of first importance throughout scripture. And he says 'If we agree on those things, let's not argue about those other things that just bring division.'

One example of where he talks about this is in Romans 14. And there's two verses that I have up here, Romans 14:1 and Romans 14:19. And these kind of bracket some of that passage in Romans 14 somewhat. But Paul...Romans 14 is all about...it's all about foolish disputes between believers, and he gives a couple of examples. One example that he gives is bringing division over what you can eat and drink. Paul says 'Listen, it's pointless to argue about what you can eat and drink, what is ok and what's not ok. Don't worry about that, don't divide over that.' Or day of the week you're supposed to worship...that's a silly, foolish dispute, and all it does is bring division. And it's ok—we will see things differently. But we're to interact with one another with mutual respect, and love, and submission as believers in Christ. And so that's what he says there. It's these secondary matters, these side issues, that we can divide and disagree. And it's ok; we can disagree, but let's not let it divide us. Let's avoid foolish disputes that just end up in quarreling. That's basically what he says—don't do that.

Here's the second type, though. There's pointless outside disputes...pointless outside disputes is what I'd term these. And it's just basically they're disputes between someone who is a believer and someone who is not; someone who is inside the church, who is a part of the body of Christ, and someone who is not. These are disputes...and this does not mean that we don't defend the faith, that we don't discuss our faith with people, or that we don't disagree. It also doesn't mean that we seek unity with everybody out there, and we're just going to agree on everything and our differences don't matter. What it means is that there can be foolish disputes, because someone, that non-believer...their heart is so hard towards the truth they just are not willing to hear it. They don't want to hear or to know the truth. And so what we see here, that's the same thing where, in verses 22-23 of [2] Timothy 2, again he says, 'Listen, pursue peace along with those who are running after God with a pure heart'...they want to know God with a pure heart, they are seeking after the truth. If they are willing to seek after the truth, go ahead and continue discussing. But if they aren't, reject the foolish disputes 'cause all you're gonna be doin' is beatin' your head against a wall, and all it's going to do is cause them to dig their feet, their heels, in deeper and deeper and deeper. So go ahead and turn your back on that foolish dispute, 'cause their heart is just not receptive to truth.

We see Paul do this a couple of times; well, actually he does it numerous times through Acts, but a couple of places that he does this is in Athens in Acts 17. He's telling the Athenians about the resurrection, and many of them ridicule him. They say, 'That's ridiculous; there's no way that people come back from the dead. The resurrection is silly.' And they just start mocking him. And he says, 'Ok, that's fine. You don't have to listen.' And he instead turns his attention, and he continues discussing, and teaching and working with those who are not closed to the idea; they want to hear more about it. And so, 'ok,' he says, 'I'll keep talking with these people.' Same sort of thing happens in Corinth. He goes to the synagogue. And there he's discussing the scriptures with Jewish people there. And Paul, himself, is a Jew. But he's discussing in the synagogue, and they have a disagreement. And they start disputing, and they're arguing, and they just...they don't wanna hear it. And so Paul says, 'Ok, fine. Listen,' in Acts 18 he says, 'I'm washing my hands. I've tried telling you the truth, you don't want to hear it, so I'm going to turn and I'm going to go speak to these other people who are willing to hear, and they're seeking for truth. And the consequences of it are on your own head.'

That's the idea, is that we turn away from foolish disputes. We don't just sit here and just keep beating our head against the wall. That's the first thing that we need to do if we're going to defend our faith in a godly, biblical way, is reject foolish disputes; be a people of peace.

So here's the next part. In verses 24-25 Paul explains to Timothy, 'Listen, what I want you to do is avoid quarrels. Don't be a quarrelsome person. Instead, you need to be gentle with people; you need to be willing to teach, to explain. You need to be patient with them. It's a process.' It's not something that you just say 'Hey, here it is!' and they go ahead and they say, 'Gee, you're right.' Most of the time people mull over things. We talk. We discuss. And we learn. And he's saying, 'Listen, be patient and instruct these people that you are kind of having this disagreement with; just discuss with patience and with gentleness.'

Makes me think of 1 Peter; a passage that we oftentimes think of is the one where, in 1 Peter 3:15, where Peter says, "*Always be ready to give a defense for your faith.*" Usually we stop there, and we don't go on to verse 16 which says

*However, make sure that you do it with gentleness and respect.*

Even Peter, the most bombastic...he's 'Rocky,' that's what his name means, ok. You think "Rocky Balboa," ok, here we go, Rocky. This is Jesus' disciple who is always stickin' his foot in his mouth. He's sayin', 'Listen, go ahead and always be prepared to defend the faith. However, do it with gentleness and respect.' That's what Peter says. It's this idea that we give a defense, but it's not combative with this other person. We do so respectfully.

And the question, of course, would be 'Why? Why do we do that?' Well, we'll get to that in just a second. But first I want to look at a couple of reasons why we oftentimes fail to gently explain the truth of the gospel, of our faith. The first reason...there's three reasons that I'm gonna give you here, and the first reason is simply this—we aren't confident in our own faith. We aren't confident in our own beliefs. We believe something, but we've never thought about why we believe it. We've never worked through 'why; why do I believe this.' And so all of a sudden what happens is we encounter someone who starts asking the question, 'Why? Why do you believe this? Why do you say that?' And we don't have an answer. And so our whole world starts shaking because our foundation is coming loose, and we feel like we're backed into a corner; 'this is something I feel strongly, I believe strongly, but I don't have an answer,' and so I start getting defensive. And so I lash out emotionally; and I'm just tryin' to lash out at 'em, and I'm just trying to basically get them to back off and stop calling my beliefs into question. And I think that if I can just get them to back off, I've defended my faith. But that's not the example Paul gives here, where we're explaining, and discussing, and talking through with gentleness and respect and patience.

And so here's what we're going to do. We're gonna...and this is gonna be a little bit different...we're gonna have to have audience participation here, ok, so be ready. If...oh man, I feel like I'm airborne again. Ok, inboard personnel, people closest to the center, ok? If you will look under your seat you will find a cup, ok? There's a little cup under there; it's got pencils and little pieces of paper in it kind of like this, ok? [Holds up small piece of paper] Here's what we're gonna do. We're gonna take a survey, ok? Go ahead, take one of these pieces of paper, and a pencil if you need it. Go ahead and pass it down the aisle towards the outboard personnel. Ok? (Inboard personnel stand up ☺) Sorry, it's been a few years since I've been able to say that. So, anyway, what we're gonna do is...we're wanting to get feedback from you. We want you to go ahead and mark on here the top five challenges that you're facing. And if there is some challenge that is not listed on here, go ahead and write it on the back, or on the side, or in the margins...wherever. Go ahead and write it on here, ok?

Here's the thing that we're going to do...we are going to take the results from this survey, we're gonna compile it, and that's part of the reason we're doing the prelude or the preview to the series about a month...month-and-a-half early, is so that what we're going to do is we're going to take this survey and we're going to find the results, and over the course of this summer we're going to seek to answer the biggest challenges that are being faced by our congregation. And so go ahead, feel free to mark your top five, feel free to mark ones that you have personally struggled with, or you're challenged by. Mark down the challenges that people, other people, have made to you and to your faith. Or maybe it's just some challenges that you would like answered out of curiosity, or just in case. Maybe if there's something that's not listed on here that you'd really like an answer to, go ahead and write it on the back.

And what we'll do is we'll take all of these, we'll compile 'em, and we'll answer to, in a series of sermons, the most common ones. So we'll give you a minute here and let you work through these and answer 'em. You don't have to order 'em numerically, like 'Oh, this is my number one,' or anything else. We'll just tabulate and see which the most common responses are. Feel free to go ahead and just look over it again. I'm gonna continue on. But here's what we're gonna do. At the conclusion of the sermon, at the conclusion of the service here, feel free...we'll have ushers back at the entrances where you came in with baskets. And feel free to just drop your survey in that basket back there, ok?

And whenever you're done, yeah, just go ahead and at the conclusion of the service or something, feel free to just put the pencil right there on the seat, how 'bout that? Ok, we'll pass the cup back, how 'bout that? Outboard personnel, pass the cup back to the inboard personnel, ok, the people closest to the center. You can drop your pencils in there. But what we'll do is we'll go on.

And the second common reason why we fail to gently explain our faith is that we think that this person's fate is on our shoulders. We take on the responsibility of whether or not they decide to become a follower of Christ. And so I carry that burden on my own shoulders. What ends up happening is we've forgotten the fact that, ultimately, it's not us who saves somebody. It's God. That's why Paul, in verse 25, says 'Listen...' He answers to this. He says, "*Perhaps God will grant them repentance to know the truth.*" It's God's responsibility, it's not ours. The fate of this person does not rest on our shoulders. The responsibility that we have is to lovingly, gently, patiently explain the truth. The results are between God and that person, not us. So that's something that we just have to recognize. That's why Paul says, "*Perhaps God will grant...*"

And we'll move on and explain this third reason here. It's because we're determined to win a debate. This is the third common reason that, a lot of times, we fail to gently explain the faith to people, is because we are determined to win a debate. I can easily slip into this. I love philosophy and logic, and argumentation, and just looking at the way that beliefs and thoughts and statements are constructed, and whether or not it's logical and reasonable. But it's something that is not ok to slip into, where we're just trying to win a debate. Because when we slip into this, and our whole goal is to just win this argument, we've made this person our enemy and our opponent. And we've lost sight of their actual state. Because what Paul says is, 'Listen, this person is captive. They are being held captive to the lies of Satan.' If anything, we should be compassionate towards this person. We are not trying to *defeat* them—we are trying to *defend* them.

You see, when we defend the faith we're defending the faith for ourselves, but it's not even so much defending our faith, as it is that we are trying to defend this person from the traps and the lies that they have been taken captive to. When we're defending our faith we're not defending ourselves; we are defending the person to whom we are speaking. We're defending them against the lies of Satan. And if we forget about that, if we lose sight of that, then what ends up happening is we see them as the enemy. And so we start trying to defeat them, and we just lost the battle. And Satan says, 'Awesome! Thank you, thank you, thank you.'

You see, what Paul says is these people who are not followers of Christ, they are ensnared. We're fighting on their behalf, to free them from captivity, to explain the truth to them. And we need to remember that so that, if we realize that, that we are dealing with someone who is held captive by the lies of Satan, it will help us remember that we need to have compassion for this person. We need to be patient with them. And hopefully, perhaps God will grant them repentance to know the truth. 'Cause that's the whole goal; that's the whole point, is that ultimately they will come to know the truth and to follow God.

So here's what we're gonna do. In just a second Joel's gonna come up and he's going to lead us in our closing song for the next...I don't know...nine hundred and eighty-something days, or whatever it is...that we'll be continuing on with this. But before we do, after the song, if you would like to speak with anyone, if you would like to come down front, pray, ask questions, please feel free. I'll be down here; there'll be a couple of others. But here's what I just want to leave you with this challenge. If you are a follower of Christ, what we are called to do is to gently, patiently discuss and explain our faith to people who don't agree with us. We're to do that gently, patiently, lovingly. But second of all, if you're here and you're not a follower of Christ, my challenge to you is simply this. Jesus Christ did come; that much is...I mean, that is one of the most historically verified facts—that Jesus Christ lived. He was crucified because of the claims that He made. And it's also historically verified that immediately following His crucifixion, within days, His followers insisted that He was a live again. And they went to their deaths insisting that. And they would have been spared had they just said, 'Ok, we were mistaken.' But they would rather die than go ahead and say that they didn't see Him rise again. And so the challenge that I would make to you is simply this—if you're here to day and you don't know Christ, if you have never come to the point where you realized that "I'm a sinner and I need to be saved," Jesus Christ is the only one who can do that. He lived a perfect, sinless life, and he died the death that He did not deserve so that we could live. And because He is risen again, because He is still alive today, we know that we, too, can have life and our sins can be forgiven.

But Joel, let's go ahead. Joel will come on up and he will lead us in this, and then we will dismiss the service.

[Congregation sings the prayer song.]

Go in grace.