

Fight the Good Fight

1 Timothy 6:11-21

Let us begin this morning by reading the first ten verses of 1 Timothy 6 to give us some background before going on to the second half of this chapter.

1 Timothy 6:1-10 NAS:

¹ *All who are under the yoke as slaves are to regard their own masters as worthy of all honor so that the name of God and our doctrine will not be spoken against.*

² *Those who have believers as their masters must not be disrespectful to them because they are brethren, but must serve them all the more, because those who partake of the benefit are believers and beloved. Teach and preach these principles.*

³ *If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness,*

⁴ *he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions,*

⁵ *and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain.*

⁶ *But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment.*

⁷ *For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either.*

⁸ *If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.*

⁹ *But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction.*

¹⁰ *For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.*

I would like to tell you a story about a great man of faith and prayer, a man who knew how to fight the spiritual warfare that Satan wages against God's servants-- George Mueller.¹

¹ Note that his name is usually spelled "Mueller" although in the following anecdote, the source has chosen to spell it "Muller."

A story is told by the captain of a ship on which George Muller of Bristol was traveling. During his life he received more than 1,000,000 pounds from the Lord, without advertising—every penny came as an answer to prayer.

“We had George Muller of Bristol on board,” said the captain. “I had been on the bridge for twenty-four hours and never left it and George Muller came to me and said, ‘Captain, I have come to tell you I must be in Quebec on Saturday afternoon.’ ‘It is impossible,’ I said. ‘Then very well, if your ship cannot take me, God will find some other way. I have never broken an engagement in fifty-seven years; let us go down into the chart room and pray.’

“I looked at that man of God and thought to myself, ‘What lunatic asylum can that man have come from, for I never heard of such a thing as this?’ ‘Mr. Muller,’ I said, ‘do you know how dense this fog is?’

“‘No,’ he replied, ‘my eye is not on the density of the fog, but on the living God who controls every circumstance of my life.’ He knelt down and he prayed one of the most simple prayers. When he had finished I was going to pray, but he put his hand on my shoulder and told me not to pray. ‘As you do not believe He will answer, and as I believe He has, there is no need whatever for you to pray about it.’

“I looked at him and George Muller said, ‘Captain, I have known my Lord for fifty-seven years and there has never been a single day when I have failed to get an audience with the King. Get up, Captain, and open the door and you will find the fog has gone.’

“I got up and the fog indeed was gone, and on that Saturday afternoon George Muller kept his promised engagement.”²

Let us now pick up at verse 11 and work toward the conclusion of this book.

1 Timothy 6:11-16 NAS:

¹¹ *But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness.*

¹² *Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence*

² Tan, Paul Lee: *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers*. Garland TX : Bible Communications, 1996, c1979.

of many witnesses.

¹³ *I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate,*

¹⁴ *that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ,*

¹⁵ *which He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords,*

¹⁶ *who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.*

“*But flee from these things, you man of God.*” Here in verse eleven Paul calls Timothy to lead a different life than these false teachers. The false teachers were controlled by money. Paul called Timothy to be controlled by God. Paul told Timothy to flee from the things that the false teachers were seeking after. Do not allow Satan any opportunity to catch you in his net. When you see him coming, shift to warp speed and leave a cloud of dust between you and him. Call upon the name of Jesus to come to your rescue. I cannot begin to tell you the number of good people I have seen caught in Satan’s web because they made the mistake of just opening the door to take a peek into his playground.

So Paul told Timothy to flee from these things, specifically pointing to the things that were a part of the character and conduct of false teachers. One of the major things to which Paul was referring was the love of money demonstrated by the false teachers. False teachers tend to water down and twist the truth of the word of God for personal gain.

Turn and run from those things as fast as possible. Paul reminds Timothy there are times when fleeing is the right strategy. But running from is not enough; we must run to what God wants for us. Philip Ryken states:

There is more to avoiding sin, however, than simply beating a hasty retreat. If all we do is run away from one sin, we will run right into the arms of another. The human heart is like a popular ride at the amusement park: sins are lined up at the entrance, waiting for a chance to get on and enjoy the ride. Satan is happy for a sin to get off the ride every now and then, provided another sin can climb on board. So a man finally masters sexual temptation, but then he becomes a glutton instead. Or a woman learns to control her tongue, but she still harbors proud and jealous thoughts. Real growth in godliness means more than just trading in one sin for another. It means replacing the don’ts with the dos. It means getting rid of vices and replacing them with virtues. And it means developing the complete character that enables a Christian to serve God well in the world.

That is why Paul tells Timothy to do more than retreat. He also

gives him a rule for pursuit: “Pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace“ (2 Tim. 2:22).³

It is important for us to notice how Paul referred to Timothy here in the opening of verse eleven. Paul called him “*you man of God.*” This meant that Timothy was different from the false teachers. Paul was saying that Timothy had his origin in God. He is God’s man and not the world’s man. Timothy’s identity came from being obedient to God and following the principles in the Word. He was a “*man of God,*” not a man of the world.

How was he to be a man of God? He was to “*pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness.*” Not only was there something Paul told Timothy to run from, there was also something Paul told him to run toward. Paul told Timothy to “*pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness.*” Timothy was being told to consistently run from the Satanically controlled false teachers and to run toward the truth, peace, and joy that will be found in pursuing God.

The word “*pursue*” (*dioko*) means to follow after or to press toward. It suggests following after with great effort. It means to run after with sincerity and excitement in order to obtain something. As a young pastor Paul did not want Timothy to allow righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness to get away from him. He should make these virtues the goal of his life,⁴ as should every pastor or church leader.

When Paul told Timothy to pursue righteousness, he meant for him to adopt the standards of God as his own. Pastors should therefore gladly trade the standards that they had previously held for the standards of God. Paul was commanding Timothy to put forth some effort to please God. Pleasing God requires a lot of hard work and personal discipline. Righteousness is duplicating Christ’s behavior and calling on the Holy Spirit daily to live as Christ would have us live.

Paul also commanded Timothy to pursue godliness, which includes being devoted to and reverencing God, behavior that can both inspire believers to strive harder to achieve the same kind of behavior, and also show unbelievers what God can do with a person who is willing to submit to His authority. This means that righteousness is to control the attitude and the actions of life.

Another thing Paul was commanding Timothy to pursue was faith (*pistis*). The word “*faith*” speaks of trusting in God and relying on God. Paul was commanding Timothy to trust God because God is worthy of trust. God is constant in His character and His conduct. God can be relied on. We can have faith in him.⁵

Paul also instructed Timothy to pursue love (*agape*). This kind of love speaks of the

³ Ryken, Philip Graham. *1 Timothy*. Phillipsburg NJ: P & R Publishing, ©2007, p. a267.

⁴ George Brooks *Preaching Commentary*, 1 Tim. 6:11.

⁵ Ibid.

unconditional love of God. It speaks of good will toward others. It is the thing within a person that moves him or her to be self-giving. Despite the fact that Timothy would not always be treated lovingly, he was to make loving others the goal of his life.⁶

Timothy needed to know that he would be responsible to God for how he treated others. Therefore, Paul commanded him to pursue love. Another thing Paul commanded Timothy to pursue was perseverance (*hupomone*). This word refers to cheerful or hopeful endurance. It speaks of constancy or patience. It suggests remaining under a load. It means to put up with things or circumstances. Perseverance refers to a quality in our character that will not allow us to surrender to our circumstances or to give in when facing trials. It suggests that a person puts up with things with a peaceful mind. Paul was commanding Timothy to hold out despite the challenges he might face. He was to stay busy doing those things that had been assigned to him.

The word perseverance speaks of active resistance to opposition. It means that Timothy needed to bear the burden of ministry while moving forward. He was not to allow the challenges of life to disturb him to the point that he became unsettled.⁷

A final thing Paul commanded Timothy to pursue was gentleness (*praupathia*). Gentleness is kindness and meekness. This was a word to Timothy to be humble. The word gentleness also means to have a mild disposition. It means to be calm. Paul was commanding Timothy to not allow people and circumstances to cause him to lose his cool.⁸

In verse 12 Paul advises Timothy to chase after personal behaviors, attitudes, and habits that would reflect his faith in Christ. He was also to fight the good fight of the faith. As a leader, he was to defend truth. *“Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.”*

There will always be attacks on God's truth from those who pretend to be Christians and who support all kinds of false teachings as well as encourage believers to be willing to compromise the truth. But the truth of God's Word must be fought for and never compromised. This fight is not one that ever has an ending. It will continue right up until the time of Christ's return. It is a fight the believer must see through to the end and it requires endurance and patience.

The eternal life which believers enter is not simply a future hope; it is also a present reality. We take hold of this eternal life when we live as God commands us to live. We will not experience the fullness of God's kingdom until Christ returns and reigns over all the earth. But the eternal quality of life is already available at the present time. We can experience it when we structure each moment of our lives in submission to God's will and commands.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

This new kind of life is what every believer is called to live, and what God makes possible by sending the Holy Spirit to live within us. It is available to all who are willing to confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, the Son of God, who was put to death in payment for our sins and raised from the dead to secure eternal life for all who trust Him. True faith cannot be hidden. "Timothy gave public witness that he believed and trusted in Jesus Christ. He had followed in the right way. Now Paul encouraged him to continue on with strength and clarity of purpose."⁹

Moving on to verse 13 we read: "*I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate.*" Several times in this letter, Paul has commanded Timothy to a variety of actions. Here again, Paul urged Timothy "*to keep this command*" (see 1 Timothy 6:14) until the return of Christ, who as the giver of earthly and eternal life, is an all-seeing and ever-present witness of Timothy's service. By far the most important witness to our Christian faithfulness is Jesus Christ. What kind of witness is your life?

Just as Timothy made a good confession before many witnesses, Christ had made the good confession before Pontius Pilate. Timothy's confession focused on his belief in Jesus as Savior and Lord. Jesus' confession before Pilate focused on his *being* Savior and Lord. Thus, the *good confession* is understanding and telling who Jesus is.

Jesus' trial before Pilate is recorded in the Gospels.¹⁰ Listen to what Jesus said to Pilate in Matthew 27:11 NAS:

Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor questioned Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And Jesus said to him, "It is as you say."

No matter how difficult his circumstances might become, Timothy always would have the example of Jesus who remained faithful in the face of death. Paul was setting before Timothy the same example noted in Hebrews: "*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God*" (Hebrews 12:2).

And what is the charge given in verse 13? It is stated in verse 14. Timothy is to fight for the accuracy and purity of the doctrine. He is to agonize against those false teachers who would lead congregations astray.

"Sound doctrine does not preserve itself, however. It must be defended. The word Paul uses for fighting is the Greek word for

⁹ Knut Larson, *Holman New Testament Commentary – I & II Thessalonians, I & II Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, ed. Max Anders (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2000), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 247.

¹⁰ Matthew 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 23:2-3; John 18:36-37

struggle (*agonizo*). It sometimes refers to an athletic competition such as a boxing match or a wrestling tournament. Here it may also be taken in a military sense, especially since it echoes a similar command from the beginning of the letter. . . What this rule means, rather obviously, is that there are times when Christians--especially Christian ministers--will have to fight for it. Not that they are belligerent, of course. Paul has just told Timothy to "pursue gentleness" (1 Tim. 6:11). But there is a fight to be fought, and every loyal soldier in Christ's army must fight it. As Calvin said, "Christ calls all His servants to warfare."¹¹

Paul tells Timothy to *keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Paul urged (1 Timothy 6:13) Timothy to keep "*the commandment*." What commandment was he referring to? He was probably referring to the "*sound instruction*" and "*godly teaching*" explained in verse 3. But he also may have been referring to Timothy's commission as a leader in the early church, specifically in Ephesus, or for Timothy to continue in his pursuit of godly character. Paul could certainly be referring to all of these things he has previously spoken of in this chapter. By being true to these things, Timothy's ministry would also keep his congregation safe, *without spot or blame* until the return of Jesus Christ. The commands need only be followed *until* Jesus returns. At that time, the good fight will be over; the battle will be won.¹²

As we move to verses 15 and 16 we read: "*which He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.*"

God will make this all happen when He is good and ready. And the time is not known to anyone, Acts 1:7: "*He said to them, It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority;*" God is the mighty ruler over all of the universe. Everyone and everything will come under His rule. That is the meaning of "*The King of kings*." In Revelation 17:14 we see the same title applied to the Lord Jesus Christ, designating Him as the ruler of the whole world.

Lord of lords is basically the same kind of reference to Jesus having all the rulers of the world under His control. There will be no one who will stand in the way of Jesus establishing His reign on the earth, and He will make that all happen when it pleases Him to do so.

We will have eternal life in Heaven only because Jesus gives it to us as a gift. We are totally dependent on Jesus if we desire that gift. There is no way we can get it on our own. He has it because He is God and there is no one who can take that away from Him. God will exist forever and death will never affect Him (John 5:26).

¹¹ Op. Cit., Ryken, p. 269.

¹² Bruce B. Barton, David R. Veerman, Neil Wilson, *Life Application Bible Commentary – 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1993), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "1 TIMOTHY 6:3-21".

The light where Jesus dwells is so brilliant and dazzling that our mortal eyes would be blinded by it. Heaven is constantly represented as a place of the most pure and brilliant light, needing not the light of the sun, or the moon, or the stars, and God is represented as dwelling in that light, surrounded by amazing and inapproachable glory.¹³

1 Timothy 6:17-21 (NASB):

¹⁷ *Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.*

¹⁸ *Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share,*

¹⁹ *storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.*

²⁰ *O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called "knowledge"—*

²¹ *which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith. Grace be with you.*

There are some individuals whom God blesses with wealth. But that is a gift and a trust from God.

1 Chronicles 29:14 NAS:

". . . For all things come from You, and from Your hand we have given You."

People should not value themselves on account of their wealth, or look down with pride and arrogance on those they consider inferior. They should not suppose that they are any better, or any nearer Heaven because they are wealthy. Material wealth and power have absolutely nothing to do with character and salvation. They do not necessarily make a person wise, great, or good. In all these things a person who does not have wealth may be vastly superior to those who do have it. And if people have wealth, it should not make them proud. For the simple truth is that their wealth is a gift from God; they have been made rich because God has chosen to make them rich, not necessarily because of any skill or wisdom which they have. Being rich increases their responsibility, and if they do not responsibly use their wealth in serving God, they could very soon become as poor as the "church mouse." They could soon be shown by God why they had no reason to be proud.

Riches are uncertain because they are so easily lost. (See Luke 12:16-21.) One who is rich today has no security that they will be tomorrow; and that their needs will be met. A man whose house is in flames, or who is shipwrecked, or whose child lies dying, or who is himself in the agonies of death, can derive no comfort from the fact that he is richer

¹³ Revelation 21:23,24; Revelation 22:5; Revelation 4:6; Ezekiel 1:4, Hebrews 1:3

than other men. Paul tells Timothy to caution the rich that a person who has a lot of money is very likely to "*trust*" in his riches, and to suppose that he needs nothing more. He feels little if any need for fellow men, and he is very likely to feel that he is not dependent on God. It is for this cause that God has recorded so many solemn declarations in His Word respecting the instability of riches showing how easily riches may suddenly vanish away.^{14 15}

God permits us to enjoy everything. He has given everything in the works of creation and redemption to mankind for their happiness, and we should therefore trust in Him. He has not merely given wealth for the comfort of men, so those to whom He has given such great blessings should trust in Him, and make that wealth available to help others as God advises him to do so.

Verse 18 is primarily a command to the wealthy that they should be willing to share their blessings with others, so as to make others comfortable. And why should they bother to do this (other than that God has commanded it)? Because then they are "*Laying up in store for themselves the treasures of a good foundation*" (verse 19). The meaning of this verse is that they were to make such a use of their property that it would contribute to their eternal welfare. It might be a means of providing them with a greater reward in Heaven if they would use it so as to do the most good possible (Luke 16:9). They would then be using their earthly wealth to assure true riches in Heaven (Matthew 6:19-20; 19:21-22; Mark 10:21).

As we come to verse 20 we read: "*O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called 'knowledge.'*" All that has been entrusted to Timothy as described in this book, including the honor of the Gospel and the interests of the church, He was to sacredly guard and not allow it to be taken from him. He was to ignore the empty, foolish words that are only meant to produce controversy and damage the reputation of the Church.¹⁶

The word in verse 20 translated "*knowledge*" is sometimes translated "*science.*" We tend to see religion and science at war with one another. But God is Author of them both and they totally agree, when rightly understood. Religion has nothing to fear from true science, and the minister of the Gospel is not exhorted to dread that. He is only to stand against proclamations from the scientific community that try to discredit the Bible. It is interesting to note that a number of atheistic scientists, after studying the universe and biology, have become dedicated believers in God and that He is indeed the Creator.

"*Which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith. Grace be with you*" (verse 21). Evidently some who claimed to be true Christians were attracted by false teaching and soon, as a consequence, believed the lies and discarded the truth of God's Word.

¹⁴ Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament Explanatory and Practical*, WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "1 Timothy 6".

¹⁵ See Proverbs 23:5; 27:24; Jeremiah 17:11.

¹⁶ Op cit., Barnes.

Such a result has been far too common in this world, and how we pity those who continue to make that choice today.¹⁷

Paul closes by giving a blessing to Timothy: “*Grace be with you.*” It was common for fathers in biblical times to give a blessing to their sons, and Paul had opened this letter by calling Timothy his “*son in the faith*” (1 Timothy 1:2) and now he is closing it by calling on God’s grace to bless Timothy. May each of you also know God’s grace. Amen.

¹⁷ 1 Timothy 1:6; 1:7; 6:10.