

1 Timothy 6:11-16 “Fight the Good Fight” (November 6, 2011)
Daniel 7
Psalm 110

While there is much in Daniel’s vision that would require a whole sermon in itself,
the central point is abundantly clear:

the beasts – those nations that are hostile to God and to his people –
will be overthrown;
their dominion – their lordship – will end;

and the one like a son of man will receive
“dominion and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him.”

And “his kingdom...shall not be destroyed.”

Through the coming of the son of man,
the kingdom of God will be established –
a kingdom that will never end.

Psalm 110 is a fitting response to Daniel 7.

Psalm 110 is the speech of the Ancient of Days
as he raises the Son of Man to his right hand,
saying,
“Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.”

We do not yet see everything under his feet –
but we see Jesus, crowned with glory and honor for the suffering of death
that he underwent for us.

So let us sing Psalm 110.
Read 1 Timothy 6

In recent weeks many of you have talked with me in various contexts
about the struggles and trials you face –
and you wonder, does it ever get better?
Or am I doomed to face these struggles and trials forever?

Paul answers you here.

He warns you against different doctrine –
dissension, slander, unhealthy craving for controversy;
he warns you against imagining that godliness is a means of gain –
and says that “those who desire to be rich fall into temptation –
and through this craving “some have wandered away from the faith.”

It's not that the temptation will go away.

Timothy has been Paul's colleague for nearly 20 years –
but Paul thinks that Timothy still needs to hear the warning!

1. Run Away from This – Chase after That! (v11)

¹¹*But as for you, O man of God, flee these things.*

Flee the love of money

Flee the desire to be rich

Or earlier in verses 3-4:

Flee doctrines that do not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Flee the unhealthy craving for controversy

How do you respond to temptation?

Flee.

Run away.

Get out of there!

(Think of Joseph, who literally ran away from Potiphar's wife!)

And instead,

Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.

I need to stop a moment to explain what it means to “pursue” something.

The word here, diwkw, can be translated “to pursue” or “to persecute.”

It can also be translated “to strive” or “to press forward.”

You are to strive after godliness.

You are chase down righteousness fervently –

there is nothing half-hearted about this word.

You are to chase down righteousness and godliness

with the same fervor and intensity

that you would chase down someone who stole your wife's purse.

Now, sometimes lists of words can run by us quickly –

so I'd like to pause for a moment and look at each one:

Pursue righteousness.

What does it mean to “pursue righteousness”?

Righteousness has to do with how our world is ordered.

A nation characterized by righteousness

is a nation that is well-ordered – a nation with good laws.

Likewise, a family is characterized by righteousness

when the father (and mother) order the household well.

(think back to the bishop and the deacons in chapter 3
who “must manage their own households well” (v4, 12),
or the remarried widow who manages her household in 5:14)

Pursuing righteousness is very closely related to Jesus call
“Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,
and all these things will be added to you.” (Matt 6:33)

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was saying don’t pursue stuff;
don’t pursue money and things;
but seek first the kingdom of God – and all the things you need
will be given you.

Here, Paul has just said, stop pursuing things – do not love money.
Instead, pursue righteousness – pursue the kingdom of God –
order your world (however big or small it may be)
according to the priorities of Christ’s kingdom.

And pursue godliness.

We have seen that “godliness” is a very important idea in 1 Timothy.
Paul says that Jesus Christ *is* the mystery of godliness –
who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit,
seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations,
believed on in the world, taken up in glory. (3:16)

and this “mystery of godliness” –
the incarnation and exaltation and proclamation of Christ –
is at the heart of our pursuit of godliness.

If you do not pursue *Jesus*, then you are not pursuing godliness!

Paul says to Timothy – “But as for you, O man of God, flee these things.
Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.”

Too often we make only a feeble nod toward these things.
And then we’re off again on our pursuit of our selfish desires.

Flee these things!

Pursue faith.

Paul had once “persecuted” the faith (same word – diwkw!)

Now he says that you must *pursue* faith.

In one sense, either you have faith or you don’t.
But most of you know that faith is not so simple.

There are days when you wonder, “do I really believe?”
If you become complacent in your faith,
then you can very easily “drift” away from faith.

That is why Paul says to *pursue* faith.
Chase it down!
Don’t let it get away!

Have you become stuck in a rut?
A rut that includes succumbing to your cravings?

Don’t just sit there!
Flee these things!

And pursue love.

Love does not come naturally to us.
Oh, sure, romantic feelings come naturally to us!
Warm fuzzies are a dime a dozen!

But not love.

When we went through 1 John a few months ago,
we saw what *love* looks like.
Love lays down your life for the other –
regardless of whether the object of your love deserves it!

Think about marriage.

Do you love your wife?
Oh, of course!
She does all these great things for me!
That’s not love – that’s selfishness.
Selfishness says – I’ll do all these nice things for her,
because then she’ll do nice things for me!

You pursue *love* when you set aside your desires and your wishes
in order to lay down your life for her –
as Christ laid down his life for us.

But Paul is not just talking about marriage here.

He is talking about something that should characterize us in every aspect of life.
And of course, he is particularly addressing the pastor:

Pursue love.

It has to start with me.
I need to lay down my life for you.
As we’ve seen throughout 1 Timothy,

Paul sees the bishop, the deacons, the elders –
as exemplary Christians – those who are to model
what a Christian is supposed to look like.

And when I feel like that is too overwhelming a task,
Paul reminds me of the next line:
“pursue steadfastness.”

The race is not to the swift – but to the one who endures.
You need patience – endurance – steadfastness –
It’s not that a short burst of speed will outrun sin!
Fleeing the love of money – fleeing your fleshly cravings –
and pursuing Christ
is an endurance race!

Not the sprinter – but the cross-country runner – is our model!

And “Pursue gentleness” –
meekness – humility –

In Paul’s day, “meekness” was not a prized quality!
In Paul’s day – as in ours – the idea was that you need to get ahead in life!
That requires ambition, pride, fortitude!

Paul says, “pursue gentleness.”
Strive after ... meekness.

Your Lord and Master, Jesus Christ,
humbled himself and steadfastly endured the cross.

Do not be surprised that humility and meekness are central to the Christian life!

But humility and meekness are not passive qualities!
You must actively pursue them – seek them out – and strive for them.

Have you ever diligently sought after a promotion?
Have you ever worked hard on a project?
Have you ever carefully planned for a financial goal?

I think you know what’s coming next!

Do you carefully plan for how you are going to become more godly?
Do you work hard on your gentleness?
Do you diligently seek after faith, love, steadfastness?

We live in a world that chops life up into bits and pieces.

But you may not do that.

Your Christian life is lived in every place where God calls you to go.

Your pursuit of righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness
must be a pursuit that consumes you every day!

And this is the point of verse 12:

2. The Point of the Fight: Eternal Life (v12)

¹² *Fight the good fight of the faith.*

The Christian life is a fight – a struggle.

Don't expect it to be easy!

If you think you can just coast along and everything will be fine,
you picked the wrong religion!

You picked a religion where the founder was killed by the powers of this age,
and he told his disciples that the one who would come after him,
must “deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me!”

At every point along the way –
in every stage of life –
you will be tested!

The hardest tests are the ones that seek to lure you into complacency.

“You don't need to fight – that's just ‘works righteousness’!”

“If you pursue gentleness and faith, everyone will think you're a wimp!”

What are you pursuing?

Paul says:

Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

What are you grabbing on to?

Maybe your work isn't what you had hoped it would be.

Maybe it's not all that fulfilling.

Maybe your grand visions of significance and glory have faded to ashes.

But what sort of life were you seeking?

If you set your hope on the life of this age,

if you set your heart on things that perish,

and devote your energies to accumulating stuff and status,

then you can say, “*carpe diem*” – seize the day!

Is that what you want to hold on to?
Have you ever tried to “seize the day”?
When the day is over, what’s left?

Time just slips through your fingers – and you are left with nothing!

But Paul says, “*take hold of the eternal life to which you were called.*”

Your hope is imperishable.

Your hope is sitting at the right hand of the Father.

The mystery of godliness has come in the flesh, been vindicated in the Spirit,
and now is proclaimed to you.

Take hold of *him*.

Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called.

Your confession about Jesus – the *good* confession – is at the heart of the fight of faith.

Paul refers to Timothy’s confession before many witnesses.

By itself, it is not clear what this refers to.

Is it when Timothy was ordained and started preaching?

Or is it when Timothy was baptized –

when he confessed Christ before a hostile synagogue,
renouncing all to follow Jesus.

Paul doesn’t give us enough information to say for certain,

but the parallel that he draws to Christ’s confession

strongly suggests that Timothy’s confession occurred before hostile witnesses.

3. Christ’s Confession and Yours: an Eschatological Focus (v13-16)

¹³ *I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, ¹⁴to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.*

Verses 13-16 show us how Christ’s confession forms the foundation for Timothy’s confession.

Paul summons God as witness (“I charge you in the presence of God”) –

“God who gives life to all things” –

and he summons Christ Jesus as witness –

“who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession.”

Timothy’s confession is rooted in Jesus’ confession.

The reason why you confess Jesus is Lord

is because Jesus first made the good confession before Pontius Pilate.

You only summon witnesses when you are going to say something really important.
And you cannot summon witnesses more holy and solemn
than God “who gives life to all things,”
and Christ Jesus “who made the good confession.”

So what is this *really important* thing that Paul wants to say?

“I charge you...to keep the commandment unstained
and free from reproach until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”

So it is absolutely essential for Timothy to keep the commandment.
Which “commandment”?

If this is really important,
and we really need to hear this,
then it would kinda be nice to know what we are supposed to do!!

But Paul simply says “keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach.”
Some have argued that it refers to some commandment that Timothy was given
when he was baptized – or when he was ordained.

But that would be altogether too obscure.
I would suggest that the commandment
that you must keep unstained and free from reproach
is found in the imperatives of verses 11-12.
Flee these things (the love of money, and other cravings).
Pursue righteousness.
Fight the good fight of the faith.
Take hold of eternal life.

I know – that’s four commandments – not one.
But I think you can see that these four things are all part of one commandment.
Fleeing from sin doesn’t work without pursuing godliness.
Fighting the good fight of the faith
is only possible through taking hold of eternal life.

There are lots of different ways of saying this:
Moses said, “Love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul and strength.”
And “Love your neighbor as yourself.”
Micah said, “He has told you, O man, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice,
and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”
Jesus said, “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,
and all these things will be added to you.”

Another time Jesus said, “deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me.”
John said, “this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ
and love one another”

So the point of “keeping the commandment unstained and free from reproach”
is that you do not waver in your whole-hearted pursuit of Christ.

And your pursuit of righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, and gentleness
is not a “private” pursuit.
As Paul says to the Philippians, “let your gentleness be evident to all.” (4:5)

And you do this “until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
Your striving – your agonizing – your confessing – has an eschatological focus.

You are to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach
until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ –
because when he appears, you also will appear with him in glory.

And that will happen “at the proper time.”

God knows what he’s doing.
He will work all things out *at the proper time*.

Our passage today is backwards.
Normally, in his epistles, Paul starts with doctrine,
and then applies his teaching to our practice.
Here Paul starts with the ethical exhortations,
and concludes with doctrine.

Sometimes this can be a useful technique.
We can be so busy wondering “what am I supposed to do?”
that we can forget who God is!

And so Paul concludes his exhortation to Timothy with a doxology:

Who is God?
“He is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords,
who alone has immortality,
who dwells in unapproachable light,
whom no one has ever seen or can see.
To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen”

Earlier we sang “Immortal, Invisible, God only Wise, in light inaccessible hid from our eyes”

What does it mean that “no one can ever see God”?

Moses saw his back.
The elders of Israel saw his feet.
Isaiah says, "I saw the LORD."
Ezekiel saw him plainly in his vision of Ezekiel 1.
John sees him sitting on a throne in the heavens –
just as Daniel did in Daniel 7.

Paul's point here is that all of these manifestations of God
are not the same thing as *seeing* God.

God is not a part of this creation.
The only way that you could see God
would be if God would take some shape – some form –
that was visible in this creation.

And so, from time to time, God has appeared in this way.
But to see a manifestation of God's glory is not the same as *seeing* God.
John tells us, "No one has ever seen God" – (John 1:18)
except the Son.
And Jesus said "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:9)

The only way to see the Father is to see him in the Son.

You are to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, and gentleness,
but if your pursuit of these things is not grounded in this doxology,
in this vision of Christ Jesus our Lord,
then your pursuit is in vain!

Pursue him!
Know him!
Love him!