

# Fight the good fight

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[ 0 : 00 ] This evening we might turn our attention for a short while to words that we have read in 1 Timothy chapter 6. And for guiding our thoughts we take verse 12.

1 Timothy chapter 6 verse 12. Fight the good fight of faith. Lay hold on eternal life whereunto thou art also called, and has professed a good profession before many witnesses.

Now when Paul wrote his letters to Timothy, he was an elderly Christian coming to the end of his pilgrimage. But you see, Timothy was a young man, a young Christian, and there was all of life, humanly speaking, before him.

And as far as Timothy was concerned, he found himself, you see, in a hostile environment as far as Christianity was concerned.

And so this young man needed all the advice and all the encouragement that a man like the Apostle Paul could give him. After all, Paul was an experienced Christian.

[ 1 : 19 ] He was a soldier of the cross who had many, a scar that had been received in the heat of battle. And if anyone had the right to admonish and give instruction, it was this man, Paul.

And that is what he does here in his correspondence with Timothy. Now you might say to me, well, what has that got to do with me? Well, you see, like Timothy, we find ourselves in a world of unbelief.

We find ourselves today in a world that refuses to acknowledge the living and the true God. We are living in a world that rejects Christ and that rejects the claims of Christ.

We are living tonight in a world that is indulging itself in crass materialism and the excesses that go with materialism.

And we are living in a world where we are being conditioned to accept things that belong to godlessness and a pagan culture.

[ 2 : 37 ] And so, like Timothy, we need encouragement and we need guidance. And we can do no better than go back, as it were, to the first century and listen to this aged man as he comes to the end of his lifetime and as he now sits down and writes this letter to his young friend.

And what does he say to him? Oh, man of God, flee these things, that is, the things that belong to the perishing world that he found himself in.

Flee these things. Follow after righteousness. That's your duty. Godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.

These are the Christian virtues that you must seek for. And then the apostle goes on to say to the young man, and fight, he says, fight the good fight of faith.

Lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called. And he seems to say to him, go on professing a good profession before many witnesses.

[ 3 : 55 ] Well then, let us just look at this contest of faith and this prize that belongs to us and this profession that we have to make.

Just let's look at this contest of faith. Fight the good fight of faith. Now, of course, the metaphor used here is in connection with stiff and unrelenting opposition.

And from his other writings, we find that the apostle was well acquainted with the Greek games of his time. He speaks about running.

He speaks about wrestling. He speaks about boxing. He speaks on the one hand of the Christian being in a race. And then on the other hand, he speaks of the Christian fighting in a ring.

Know ye not, he says, that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run that ye may obtain. So fight, not as one that beateth the air.

[ 5 : 03 ] And in his letter to the Ephesians, he describes, you remember, the Christian as wrestling. We wrestle, he says, not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against

the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Do you know, Christian friend, that you are wrestling? Do you know that round about you there are principalities and powers trying their utmost, if it were possible, to destroy you?

Do you know that you must engage in this holy warfare with these powers of darkness? You're not there, as it were, in a glass case and nothing's happening to you.

You are actually involved in a world that is dominated by evil. And you are fighting. You must fight.

This is what Paul is speaking to Timothy about.

Fight, he says, the good fight of faith. And so you see, the Christian is engaged in unremitting conflict with all that is unspiritual.

[ 6 : 22 ] Did you think that as a Christian you do nothing? Did you think that as a Christian you just wait and God will take you to heaven in the end? No, no, this is a fight.

This is a race that we are in. This is where we are actually involved in doing something and we are in conflict with the powers that are unspiritual.

Well then, what was the opposition that faced Timothy as a Christian? And in asking that question we are really asking this, what is the opposition that faces us if we are going to be Christians, if we are going to take our stand on the side of Christ?

Well, first of all, you see, there was anti-God propaganda. Now that is what Timothy was up against. Anti-God propaganda.

In verse 3, the apostle says, if any man teach otherwise and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud, so on.

[ 7 : 39 ] And then, of course, he warns Timothy about those who dote about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings.

Then he speaks here about those who are engaged in perverse disputings of men, men of corrupt minds, destitute of the truth. And he tells Timothy, you see, that Timothy must avoid profane and vain babblings and oppositions of science falsely so-called.

You see, in the apostles' day and in Timothy's day, there were many kinds of religions, many kinds of different philosophies.

There were many pseudoscientists scientists who denied the truth of god and all this anti-god propaganda could have an unsettling effect upon this man.

And so, you see, Paul writes to him and he says, Timothy, you must beware of these things and you must fight the good fight of faith.

[ 8 : 52 ] You mustn't lose your faith in this world. It's precious. You must fight for it. And how easy it is for us to lose faith in the world that we are living in tonight.

Now, way back in that first century, there was Greek idealism. And how many people who lived in those days must have envied the great wisdom of the Greeks.

and though they thought if only they could be knowledgeable like the Greeks, they would know all the answers to the problems. Then there was Roman pragmatism.

And people in that first century thought that all they had to do was to apply Roman pragmatism to the problems of the hour and they would solve the issues of the day.

And if you weren't a Greek idealist or a Roman pragmatist, then you fell perhaps into the category of being a Judaism. That is to say, you believed in a formal religion which was lifeless and devoid of spirituality.

[ 10 : 02 ] And so you see, it was necessary for Timothy to fight the good fight of faith, not to lose his faith in that situation.

And what are you up against today? What am I up against? Well, on the one hand here we have blatant atheism.

People today are proud, at least so they think they are proud. They say, we are atheists. We don't believe in God at all. And if they're not atheists, they're rather proud about taking up the position of being agnostics.

No, they'll say to these atheists, we don't go as far as you, but we won't go with these Christians.

We don't know. Don't know whether there is a God or not. Then there are those who take up their position with the Marxists or with the Maoists or with the humanists.

Then there are those, you see, who are involved in the religions of the East, the Transcendental Meditation Group. and there you see them, they'll march up and down the streets with their red

gowns on, playing their different musical instruments, handing out their literature to all and sundry with their queer hairstyles and so on.

[ 11 : 26 ] Well, this is what we're up against today. And sometimes people become bewildered by it all and they say but really is the Christian religion after all the right religion?

And it's in a situation like this and am I speaking to young people here? It's in a situation like this that you must not lose faith. You must fight the good fight of faith.

There are so many things to knock you off balance. And maybe there are some young folks here and older folks too and you might come up to me afterwards and say, ah yes, you know I've almost been knocked off balance.

I've been listening to too many people saying too many things to me. I tell you this, behind all these things that are the powers of hell, let loose upon the world of tonight.

And you and I, if we are on the side of Christ, we must wrestle, not just against flesh and blood. That might be easy enough, but we are wrestling against principalities, these awful powers of darkness that are there, hell-bent to destroy you and me.

[ 12 : 52 ] But again, what was against Timothy too in that day, that Paul warns him of, well, you see, the temptations of a godless world, that were warring against the soul, or that do war against the soul.

And so, you see, Paul warns Timothy about the riches of the world that can prove such a snare. And he says, you see, to this young man, the love of money, he says to Timothy, the love of money is the root of all evil.

still the same, you know. They that will be rich fall into temptation and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and in perdition.

And oh, how we know the power of riches. It wasn't for nothing that the Lord Jesus told a remarkable story of a man whom we call dives who lost his soul in hell.

Why did he lose it? Well, as our Lord tells us, you see, he preferred the gay and the flamboyant life with its fine linen and purple rather than suffer the privations of God's people for a season.

[ 14 : 21 ] But it wasn't for nothing, you see, that our Lord told the story of the rich farmer who had that unhealthy ambition to amass as much as he could of this world's goods.

And having amassed it all, he was going to say to his soul, soul, take thine easy, drink and be merry. But you see, he forgot God.

People today would say that rich farmer wasn't he successful? Didn't he get on well in life? Didn't he fulfill all his ambitions?

That's our estimation of him, but God's estimation was this, that the man was a total fool. Thou fool. What a foolish man you've been.

You've amassed all this. you've got it all and now you're going to leave it. And tonight your soul must come before me and you must give in your account to me.

[ 15 : 30 ] Oh, how foolish you've been. And that's how so many of us can be like in this world, this materialistic world that we live in.

and that's how many are tonight. And so you see Paul warns his young friend Timothy and he says, Timothy, see that you're not caught up in these foolish temptations.

The temptations of life are many and varied. And what Paul asked Timothy to do is the same that is being asked of us and that was this.

He said to Timothy, flee. flee these things. Don't get involved in them. If you value your soul, says Paul, then flee these things and engage in this holy warfare on the side of Christ.

And then this contest you see that we are engaged in is it's arduous, it's constant. You see, we must never forget that the foe that is before us is all powerful.

[ 16 : 43 ] Well, I should qualify that he's not all powerful, the devil, but he has got a tremendous power. It's a superhuman power. It's not to be compared to the power of God, but my, what power.

And you see, this foe that we are up against, not only is he powerful, but he is skillful. And the devil never gives up power, while we live in this world.

And so you see, we must match and meet this foe in a power and in a strength that don't belong to us, and that's the power and strength of God.

And Christ promises to give us that needed strength. My grace, he says, is sufficient for you. My strength is made perfect in your weakness. us. And so you see, in the strength of Christ, we can fight this good fight of faith.

And let us remember this, that we have weapons that enable us to match all the opposition that is made against us. As Paul says in his letter to the Corinthians, though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh.

[ 17 : 59 ] For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds. But you may ask me, what weapons have I got?

What weapons have I got really to fight this good fight of faith? Well, of course, one of the great weapons that you and I have, it's this word, the Bible.

Do you want to be a weak Christian? Well, you just close this Bible, put it aside, and I tell you this, you'll be as weak as water. Do you want to be a strong Christian?

Then take this word and use it. It's the sword of the Spirit. It's the meat of God. You say, I would like to be holy.

Do you know how you're made holy? Through the word of God, by the Spirit applying it to your heart and conscience. We are sanctified by the truth.

[ 19 : 04 ] And so, if you neglect this word, you will become a weak Christian. You will become a Samson. You will be robbed of the power and the might that you should have.

So, you've got the word of God. Have you been using it? Then, too, haven't you got prayer to assist you in this fight? Isn't there a communication between you and heaven and it's there available for you?

Some of us have telephones in our homes. You've got the instrument there in your home and there is your friend at the other end and he's got an instrument too.

You want to get in touch with him. You phone him. It goes through the exchange. Now, perhaps your instrument is all right and his instrument is all right and the telephone exchange is all right.

But it may be that the line is cut and when the line is cut you can't get through. See that you haven't cut the line between you and heaven.

[ 20 : 13 ] See that the communication is there and that you're in touch. You're praying. And then don't forget the means of grace. don't become a poor Christian because you're not keeping company with God's people.

You know, you've heard the story of the old highland elder who fell out with one of his fellow elders and he wouldn't go back to the church. He was having nothing more to do with that church. He was finished with it.

He felt terribly hurt, you see. And at last, you see, one of his brethren went along to see him. He didn't say anything to the old man.

He just sat with him by the fireside, but he took a pair of tongs and he took a coal out of the fire and he put it on the hearth. And you know what happened. Instead of the coal remaining red hot, it began to go grey until just a smoke he was cutting himself off, you see, from the fellowship of God's people which could have had such an effect on him.

Iron sharpness, iron, you know. So we must fight the good fight of faith, but we must hurry on.

[ 21 : 35 ] There is a prize here that Paul speaks of, and Paul says to Timothy, fight the good fight of faith, he says, lay hold on eternal life. That's your prize.

Claim it, it's yours. You see, the contest, says Paul to Timothy, has already been won. The prize is assured.

All you have to do is to claim it, take possession of it. Now, you know how those who are outside of Christ have their own ideals, and they strive for and take possession, of things that mean a great deal to them.

You see, for some it may be the riches of life, and so in order to get the riches of life, as Paul tells us, they err from the faith, pierce themselves through with many sorrows.

And many a man has had many a sorrow, trying to get riches. riches. And then you see there are others, and they're not interested so much in riches, they're interested in the honors that can be conferred upon them.

[ 22 : 51 ] And, of course, in order to get these honors, they will resort to unscrupulous methods to secure them. Do you remember Job and Abner?

Abner, you see, was coming over to the side of David, and he was a great general, and Job was afraid of this.

And what Job had in mind was that with the coming of Abner into the army of David, he might lose his own position as the commander-in-chief. And so he decided that he would have to get rid of

Abner, and he did.

He stabbed him to death. He used an unscrupulous method to get rid of his opponent. You remember Absalom?

Absalom wanted to become king of Israel in place of his father, and you know what he did? He caused civil war in the hope of eventually becoming king.

[ 23 : 55 ] Do you remember Herod the Great in the time of Jesus? He thought nothing of having thousands of infants massacred, in order that Christ might not grow up to be in opposition to him.

And so you see there are those who will do anything and use any means in order to gain an advantage for themselves. of course there are others and it's not the honors of a world that they are after but perhaps their whole end in life is to indulge themselves in excess.

It may be the inordinate love of gaiety. it may be the desire to satisfy the cravings of the flesh by intemperance lust. You know people like Nabal as he has been described in the Bible that fool you know Herod not the Herod of the days of Jesus but another Herod you know how he had an unlawful wife Herodias he had to have her and there are you see evil people and their whole lifetime is abandoned to eating drinking being merry this is their philosophy this is their way of life but what am I trying to say I'm trying to say this that the Christian's aim is different his aim is a life of godliness godliness says the apostle with contentment is great gain and so the man of God flees these things that I've been mentioning because the man of God has ambitions that are different and he follows after righteousness godliness faith love patience meekness these are the things that the Christian must strive for and that's included in the prize and so the prize is there claim it and of course the end as it were or the fullness of the prize will be eternal life others in the days of the apostles strove for perishable crowns in the games the Greek games of that time crowns that when you were so beautiful but with the passing of the days the glory of these crowns perished eventually the crowns passed away but you see the prize of the Christian is different it's life life in all the fullness of its meaning nobody knows what life is until they become real Christians that man out there walking up and down

Leith Walk who thinks he knows something about life because he's dabbling in drink drugs or every other evil that there might be he doesn't know what life is he's miserable but when you are in Christ you know what life is life is real and then of course when you come to the end of the day and you pass away from this scene of mortality into the life of immortality that's when you come into the fullness of the meaning of the prize what a prize it's the prize as Paul calls it elsewhere of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus it's worth striving for brethren he says I count not myself to have apprehended but this one thing I do for getting those things that are behind and reaching forward to those things that are before I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in

[ 28 : 08 ] Christ Jesus do you know this reminds me of school prize giving you know when pupils come to the end of a school year it's well known who are going to be the prize winners who's going to be the ducks the fellow knows if he's attained it he's been told all he has to do now is just to wait for prize giving day and when prize giving day comes along his name will be called and he will go forth and receive it but you've got to live as a prize winner I know a certain headmaster a contemporary of my own he's the headmaster of the high school in Greenock a great disciplinarian some years ago the head boy was the ducks of the school he was just waiting you see for the day to come his last day at school he was in sixth year his last day at school but you see he had been misbehaving he made a fool of himself there aren't many head masters who would do this but you know what the headmaster did he refused to give him his prize he wouldn't allow his name to go up on the roll of honour on that school he wasn't worthy of it my friends the prize is worth striving for it's a great prize and we are prize winners when we are in Christ let us live like prize winners

I must be going over my time we must draw to our close with this third point that I want to bring to your attention and it's the untarnished witness that the apostle speaks of and he says this remember he says you're fighting this good fight of faith you've been called to it and you are to profess and go on professing a good profession before many witnesses you see when we are engaged in the fight of faith and when we accept this victor's prize of life eternal then we are called upon to make an open declaration of whose we are and whom we serve and we mustn't be ashamed of it I tell you this you must not be ashamed of being a Christian you must not be ashamed of taking sides with

Christ he's not going to be ashamed of you when the day of reckoning comes you mustn't be ashamed of him now and you see Timothy had witnessed a good profession before many

witnesses and how had he done so well he had witnessed a good profession by participating in the sacraments in the sacrament of baptism in the sacrament of the Lord's supper and by his ordination to the holy ministry in baptism you see there is this covenant engagement when we hand ourselves over as it were to our Lord to be his and Timothy had handed himself over and then you see he had also participated in the sacrament of the Lord's supper and when we partake of the Lord's supper what are we doing we are showing forth our union with Christ by our action in eating bread drinking wine which are the symbols of his body and his blood we are testifying you see our utter dependence upon Christ for our reconciliation with God for the life that we need and in these ways and you've done it if you are a Christian here and

I've done it we have professed among many witnesses that we are Christ and we belong to Christ in our baptism in sitting at the Lord's table but we also profess publicly our faith in other ways Timothy did it as a minister of the gospel and what a faithful witness he was his life was an open book and you know what Paul said of him later on Paul said this I recall he says with joy it was with great joy that the apostle recalled it I recall he says with joy the unfeigned faith that was in you and that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and I am persuaded in you also you see the man's life testified that he believed in Christ and that he identified himself with Christ and as Paul commends Timothy for his faithful profession of faith that is implied you see that he is to go on making a good profession in the presence of many witnesses isn't it so easy to deny Christ in company by word or by deed and Paul tells Timothy never to forget the example of his own savior Christ and you and I must never forget the example of Christ and what was the example well when Christ says Paul was before Pontius Pilate he witnessed a good confession what was it that he was a king and that he had a kingdom oh not an earthly king was he nor was it an earthly kingdom but he was a spiritual king he had a spiritual kingdom and on no account would Jesus alter or deny that no matter the threat of

[ 34 : 42 ] Pontius Pilate so in spite of all opposition Christ stood firm on that issue and bore witness to it and that's the example that's set before Timothy Judas Iscariot you see had utterly failed in his profession he betrayed Christ Demas he went back on his profession why because he loved this present evil world and Paul encourages this young man with his own determination nevertheless he says I am not ashamed for I know whom I have believed and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day and to Timothy he says hold fast hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard of me in faith and in love which is in Christ

Jesus in other words Timothy had begun well and the apostle is urging him to end well isn't that something that you and I must always bear in mind you know some of us sometimes we begin so well we're all aglow all full of enthusiasm we must be careful that it doesn't pall on us and that we don't become stale Christians indifferent Christians cold hearted Christians I suppose there are young Christians here tonight and you feel it's great you've had an experience yes it's great ah but remember ahead of you there will be times when you feel that the thing is going sour on you you mustn't allow that on no condition must you allow that and that is what Paul is saying to Timothy fight the good fight of faith don't give up your faith hold on to it lay hold on eternal life where unto thou art also called

God and has professed a good profession before many witnesses well we are living in days of chaos days of upheaval the foundations of our civilization are being undermined and weakened there is a sense of despair gripping the hearts of men and women today as perhaps never before you all must sense it look at these people that you work with every day do you know what they're beginning to say we don't know what's going wrong with our world we don't know what's happening to our world we don't know where our world is going are we coming to the end of world history is some awful cataclysmic event going to overtake our generation that's the question and today as never before there are demonstrations counter demonstrations today there is a spirit of revolt abroad it's not easy to be a Christian in the present day in the past everything seemed to be so straightforward the absolutes of right and wrong were there but now there is this questioning spirit abroad new systems are being introduced so many of these new systems leave us baffled and bewildered and today we are listening to people especially in the church and they're speaking about a new theology we must have a new theology today it means you see that the God of the Bible has become irrelevant he will no longer do and people are speaking today about new ethics situation ethics according to the situation so that will determine the ethic I'm sorry for young people living today being conditioned to that sort of thing in our universities in our schools of

learning in our theological colleges well this is the day when to use a modern phrase which might be overdone but nevertheless we'll use it this is a day when we've got to stand up and be counted and that was the sense in which the apostle spoke to Timothy he was asking Timothy to stand up and be counted and that is what is being demanded of us where do we stand are we on the Lord's side God grant that we are is there someone in the congregation tonight and you said you know I'm not really on the Lord's side isn't it time you took your stand on his side this is a fight that's going to be worth it in the end and what we are being asked to do tonight is to fight the good fight of faith to lay hold an eternal life to profess a good profession before many witnesses witnesses and if we do so then when the end comes we will be ready a hundred years ago and I'm just finished ministers keep saying I'm just finished but I'm really just finished a hundred years ago there was a poet who sat down and he wrote a poem do you know what he wrote my age is in the yellow leaf the flowers and fruits of love are gone the worm the canker and the grief are mine alone he was [ 41 : 29 ] Lord Byron he died in his early thirties he had lived a debauched life he thought that happiness was to be found in this world he thought that happiness was to be found in the things that you could get out of this world but in his spirit of disillusionment he could only write the worm the canker and the grief are mine alone go back two hundred years ago another man lived and he used to make fun of God and fun of Christianity and the Bible and according to him the Bible would be on the dust heaps of Europe within fifty years of his lifetime I'm referring to Voltaire the French atheist you can go into second hand bookshops and pick up his works lying on the dust heaps of the shelves of second hand bookshops we still have the

Bible when he came to die he could only say I wish I had never been born I wish I had never been born but go back to the first century here is Paul and he is in prison in Rome he's waiting to be tried he's going to be executed of course eventually the chains are on his wrists and on his legs as we listen to him writing or as we look over his shoulder to see what he's writing in his second letter to Timothy you won't find the apostle Paul saying the worm the grief and the canker are mine alone he's not a disillusioned man far from it you'll not find him writing words of despair I wish I had never been born never for a moment does Paul give way to that kind of despair no he's full of optimism he's not looking back with nostalgia on the past he's looking forward and he's writing to Timothy in his second letter and he says this I am now ready to be offered come what may I'm ready the time of my departure is at hand I have fought a good fight I have finished my course I have kept the faith henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me at that day and not to me only but unto all them that love is appearing it's worth it isn't it for the few years that you've got left maybe they're just weeks maybe months some will get years in this congregation you'll have a few years to live perhaps a good many years to live however few however long it all goes in very quickly now for the short time we're going to live let us fight the good fight of faith and the prize is ours