

GUARDIANS OF THE MINISTRY

1ST TIMOTHY 6:11-21

Notes on

1 Timothy 6:11-21

It has been the Apostle's pattern in this letter to follow his descriptions and warnings concerning false teachers in the church with an exhortation to Timothy to be different. Such is the case here in the last chapter. Paul has just revealed the tendency of these false teachers to stir up worthless philosophical controversies and to see their godly appearance as a means to attract financial rewards like the traveling philosophers of their day. This led him to teach about money, a topic he will take up again but first he will urge and instruct Timothy in how to carry on well in his life and ministry in Christ. Four commands spell this out for Timothy: 1. *Flee* the ways of the false teachers. 2. *Pursue* righteousness... 3. *Fight* the good fight. And 4. *Take hold* of eternal life. As Gordon Fee says in his commentary: *"The imperatives exhort Timothy to persevere both in his life in Christ and his ministry (the present) and thereby to secure the awaited prize (the future), by being reminded of his beginnings—God's call and his own response (the past)."* These

commands, in typical Pauline fashion, suddenly give way to a word of glory (doxology) to God which along with the concluding remarks provides a fitting and powerful conclusion to this letter of First Timothy.

v.11 - man of God... this term comes from the Old Testament and refers to those whom God raised up at certain times to represent Him and speak His truth... **flee...** the ways of self-serving falsehood are not to be trifled with. We must run from them as from a burning building... **pursue...** Life and ministry in Christ is never primarily a "just say no" matter: It is a "say yes!" privilege... **righteousness...** this means "integrity" and indicates things being in right relationship... **godliness...** a key word in this letter... It is about a right relationship to God that shows itself in right outward behavior. **faith, love...** essential Christian virtues, they often are linked together in the Pastoral Epistles... **steadfastness...** the call is to endure and keep going even when assailed by trials of various kinds... **gentleness...** this is the spirit of people of godly character. They are not quick to defend themselves, but always show real concern for others who are oppressed or suffering...

Fight the Good Fight of Faith

¹¹ But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of the faith. 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. 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, ¹⁴ to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. ¹⁸ They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, ¹⁹ thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

²⁰ O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called "knowledge," ²¹ for by professing it some have swerved from the faith. Grace be with you. - 1 Timothy 6:11-21



v.12 - fight the good fight... Paul summarizes his thought here with this athletic metaphor which probably has one's ongoing personal struggle against evil in view... **Take hold of the eternal life...** This is the prize of athletic/spiritual contest. Why should Timothy continue the "fight?" First because he has been called to "eternal life." Then because of his previous confession. This confession is most likely the one Timothy made at the time of his baptism when he publicly declared his faith in Christ. John Stott offers a beautiful summary of these commands: *"Here then is Paul's threefold charge to Timothy—ethical (to flee from evil and pursue goodness), doctrinal (to turn from error and fight for the truth), and experiential (to lay hold of the life he has already received). It is good in our relativistic age to have truth, goodness and life set before us as absolute goals. They also constitute a healthy balance. Some fight for truth but neglect holiness. Others pursue holiness but have no comparable concern for truth. Yet others disregard both doctrine and ethics in their search for religious experience. The man or woman of God combines all three. (Stott, p.157).*

vv.13-14 - ...I charge you... What is Timothy to do?... **keep the commandment...** What commandment?... This

might refer to verses 11-12, or to his baptismal or ordination vows, or to the Christian Faith in general. Most likely, it refers to his own faith and ministry about which Paul has been instructing him throughout this letter (see vv. 4:16 & 6:20)... **the presence o God... and of Jesus Christ...** This is the essential incentive for Timothy to hear and obey what Paul is saying... God is the giver and sustainer of all life, and Jesus gave personal testimony **before Pontius Pilate** (a real, verifiable historical figure) of His identity as "King of the Jews" (and so as the Messiah and all the meanings attached to that title)... **until the appearing of our Lord...** Here is the further incentive: Jesus Christ is coming back...

v.15 - ...at the proper time... The exact time of Jesus' return? Uncertain... That He will return when the time is right? Certain.

vv.15-16 - A beautiful doxology emphasizing that God is above every human or other kind of authority... **Sovereign... King of kings... Lord of lords...** God is invincible, beyond all attempts by earthly powers to interfere... **immortal...** God is not subject to change, the effects of time or space... Only God has "life in Himself" (John 5:26)... **dwells in unapproachable light,** ... God is inaccessible, beyond the reach of sinful humanity unless He makes himself accessible... **whom no one has ever seen or can see...** God is invisible... Human senses cannot apprehend Him... We can come to know Him only in so far as He chooses to make Himself known...

v.17-19 - The letter could have ended well at v.16, but Paul now returns to the issue of money and wealth to tie up some loose ends from vv.9-10... He has told those who are relatively poor but whose basic needs are being met not to make acquisition of money their goal. Now for the first and only time in his letters, Paul addresses the rich directly. He tells those who are financially wealthy not to put their trust in

their riches but to use what has been entrusted to them for God's good purposes... William Barclay helps us see what Paul is getting at: "*The whole teaching of the Christian ethic is, not that wealth is a sin, but that wealth is a very great responsibility.*"... **not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes...** Here the twin danger of wealth in this world: 1. Pride (thinking we are better than others) and 2. Idolatry (worshipping and trusting something over God)... **on the uncertainty of riches...** Security in wealth is false security. Jesus warned about such idolatry and false treasures susceptible to the decaying work of moth, rust and thieves (Mt. 6:19-24)... **but on God who richly provides...** Riches can be lost. God cannot. And it is God who richly provides all we have not and forever... **for our enjoyment...** Gordon Fee again: "*Paul is no ascetic. The the wealthy should not play confidence in their wealth does not carry with it an attitude of total rejection... God, he says, generously gives us everything for our enjoyment (4:3-4). Enjoyment, however, does not mean self-indulgent living (5:6). The reason everything may be enjoyed lies in the recognition that everything, including one's wealth, is a gift, the expression of God's gracious generosity*"...

v.18 - do good... be rich in good works... be generous... ready to share... These are the ways the rich can and must live out their God-given responsibility...

v.19 - storing up treasure... take hold of that which is truly life... Why should the rich listen to Paul and do as he says? Because God's rewards are infinitely better and lasts infinitely longer!

vv.20-21 - Oddly in his closing (only here and at the end of Galatians) Paul offers no personal greetings. He simply repeats his main theme for Timothy: *Guard your faith and ministry well in contrast to the false teachers who have forsaken both!* His final word of blessing is also uncharacteristically brief... **Grace be with you...** it is worth noting that the "you" is plural. Paul is looking through Timothy to the whole church, and, as at the beginning of the letter, it is to God's life-giving grace that he commends them.

Read & Reflect - 6:11-21

First Reading: As you hear Paul saying these things to Timothy, how do you picture him (With a stern look? With his arm around his friend? With a trembling voice?...

Search & Consider

6:11-21 - Write down all the actions Paul commands Timothy to take (like "flee... pursue... fight...")

6:11 - What are "these things" from which Timothy is to "flee"? What is he supposed to go after instead?

6:12-15 - What do learn here about "fighting the good fight?" How do we do this? How long do we keep it up? What incentives do we have for doing this?

6:15-16 - What phrases do we find here describing the awesome characteristics of God? What do they mean?

6:17-19 - What are wealthy people warned against? What are they told to do? Why?

6:20-21 - With the whole letter in mind, what do you think it means for Timothy to “guard the deposit” entrusted to him?

Apply

How would you characterize yourself today? As a “spiritual wanderer” or as someone in determined pursuit of v.11 qualities? Why?

If you were asked to give the Commencement Address at next year’s UNR graduation ceremony—a rich university in the world’s richest country—what 3 points would you make from this passage and how would you illustrate them from your own experience?

Point 1:

Illustration:

Point 2:

Illustration:

Point 3:

Illustration:

Looking over our studies in the past several weeks, what insights from 1 Timothy have you found most helpful or most significant?

For Small Group Discussion - 1 Timothy 6:11-21

- A. **OPENER...** If money were no object, what would you most like to acquire for yourself and/or your family?
- B. **1 TIMOTHY 5:1-6:2...** Share your Personal Study Guide answers above... As time permits you may want to reflect together on these questions as well...
1. Which of Paul’s final instructions to Timothy do you find most relevant to you today?
 2. What you think of the notion of “misnamed idols/false gods” discussed in this week’s Back Page Thought? Do you agree that naming false gods “wealth” or “pleasure” or “fame” is actually inaccurate and misleading?

A FINAL THOUGHT...

Who are some of the people who have been “Paul’s” to you in your life, guiding and instructing you in the ways of Christ and showing you what it means to follow and serve Him well?

Who are some “Timothy’s” in your life right now, people who need your guidance and support? What can you do for them?

Covenant
Presbyterian
Church

Human Fear & Misnamed Idols: A Confession

At times in my life I have kept a journal of personal reflections on life circumstances, theological ideas and God's Word. On November 6, 1991, I wrote this...

What you fear most you serve best.

I've heard this said, and I suppose I've agreed. But I've been thinking about it a little more in the last day or two because I've been feeling afraid. I've been afraid about money. We're in the process of being called to a church, for the first time to an ordained position, and all too soon after the initial excitement of being selected & feeling right about the call I began to experience great anxiety. Anxiety about money...

Phone: 775-746-8118
Fax: 775-746-8195
covenant-reno.org



Our needs will be too great and the church's generosity too limited... our demands and their supply won't match... We won't be willing or able to sacrifice as we ought... They will be critical of our assessment of our financial needs... We are going to lose too much money on the sale of our house in LA... Capital gains is going to kill us... We shouldn't have "wasted" so many thousands of dollars responding to what we perceived to be God's call to go to Scotland... We've blown our housing future... We've acted foolishly...

What you fear most you serve best.

Am I serving best the god of money? Is poverty what I fear most, and is that the name of my "money god?"

Preachers warn against serving the gods of wealth and riches, but it seems to me they've got the names wrong. These gods are called "poverty" because that is what we fear: monetary powerlessness.

When the ancient enemies of Israel were serving and sacrificing to their gods they showed that these were the powers above them they most feared. When animists or other religious groups around the world today serve and sacrifice to their deities they are showing the same thing. And they may say it is the god of the harvest or the god of sunshine they are serving, but it seems to me that that is not the case: It is really the god of famine and drought and pestilence or the god of utter darkness and cold they are hoping to appease through their worship. Those are the gods they fear, and what they fear most they serve best.

Am I serving too well the god called "poverty?" Is the man pushing and pushing for success and fame and recognition serving too well the god called "insignificance" or "anonymity?" Is the woman with the tight jeans and loose reputation and the revolving door of friends and lovers serving too well the god called "loneliness?" Is the parent who holds too tightly to children and everyone else around serving too well the god called "abandonment?"

Why would we want to spend our time and energy, why would we want to give ourselves headaches and stomach problems, why would we want to spend ourselves, serving the very things we hate? These things are demons from the place of pestilence and utter cold and darkness!

Why do we serve them? Why do we, in our modern sort of way, sacrifice to them?

Because what we fear most we serve best.

The problem then, it seems, is we foolishly fear the wrong things.

"I tell you, my friends," Jesus said to his disciples in the midst of a big crowd in Judea (Luke 12:4-5), "do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him."

God Almighty, the One True God, the Creator and Sustainer of everything that is, the Lord of All... This is Whom we should really fear, only God. All of the others, all of our demons, can nag us or cause us trouble or maybe even kill our bodies, but only God can effect our eternal destiny. So, what we ought to fear most, what ought to cause us real terror, is God. He is the One we ought to be breaking our backs and bending our knees and blowing our bank accounts to appease. God is whom we should be serving best.

And the amazing, wonderful, incredible, beautiful thing, the astounding good news of the Gospel, is this: The God whom we must appease we cannot appease (our sin is too abhorrent in His perfect eyes), but that is OK because somehow He appeased Himself on our behalf (through the death of His beloved Son, Jesus, on the Cross). Why did God do this? Because He truly loves us. And this leads us to conclude something glorious beyond imagining about God Almighty who revealed Himself in Jesus Christ: This Most High God, the only One we really need to fear, is the One we least need to fear! His love is eternal and constant and it has been proved for us once and for all in Jesus Christ. God loves us, and He will never change His mind about that!

Do we then respond by going back and finding one of those demon gods we hate and who hates us to fear and serve? Absolutely not!!! We respond in faith by affirming the truth that there is no reason left for fear! And we choose, in this freedom, to serve out of gratitude, our One Great Loving Giving Gracious God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

