

Fighting the Good Fight

Let us turn to our Bibles to 1st Timothy chapter 6. 1st Timothy chapter 6 verses 12 and following. Let us listen attentively to the word of God. Fight the good fight of faith.

Lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ appearing, which he will manifest in his own time, he who is the blessed and only potentent, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom we honor an everlasting power. Amen.

Let us pray. Our Lord, Savior, God above, as we read these powerful words, especially here the doxology at the end, may it draw us unto you, Lord, with holy awe and honoring of you, God, in our heart, soul, mind, and all that we do. May we, we pray God, have more of your spirit this morning, more illumination and understanding, and God, more gumption as we need boldness to fight the good fight of the Christian faith, knowing that Jesus, who is the only potentent King of kings and Lord of lords, is he who is with us to the end.

We ask these things, God, by your mercy alone. Amen. So one way to read the Bible is to look for the verbs, that is, the main verbs of the sentence, specifically verses that urge us to do something.

So you see the imperatives we have in the English there. Do this, don't do that. This will tell us what we are called to do or to believe or say.

And of course, we have to know what these calls of actions are for to what end. And here we read Paul urging Timothy to fight the good fights. As a pastor, the apostle urges him to stand firm and to use the power by God given to him as a church officer to fight the good fight of the faith, to contend for righteousness.

What does that look like? Does that look like for pastors? What does that look like for us? So the first point, fighting the good fight, verse 12.

Fight the Good Fight

The text is properly, formally for ministers. Timothy is a young pastor, a young preacher, and Paul is writing about his common responsibilities and the things that he is called to do.

Of course, there are some particular applications that may not be immediately obvious or given to modern pastors, for example. But nevertheless, what he is called to do, pastors are called to do today, as long as there is a similar circumstance, but certainly the responsibility is there. We don't have, for example, the same kind of widow situation they had back then.

Our economics is a little different. Women can do work when they are single in that situation and the like. But nevertheless, there is much in common that is here for pastors,

not just Timothy, in other words, not just uniquely and only Timothy, but all that is common to pastors.

They too can learn here in this exhortation where Paul is urging him, in particular, to fight the good fight. It's a command of urgency, although directed to different issues, of course, but still there for us and for him in particular. The phrase, fight the good fight of the faith.

Fight the good fight of the faith, right there at the beginning of verse 12. Fight to engage, to contend. Usually it's a picture of aggressiveness, of course.

A good fight, what are we contending into? We are contending a faithful battle as opposed to unjust war. Of the faith, the good fight of the faith, what kind of fight is it? It's about the doctrines of the truth of God. A call for a stand and fight stance for the truth of the Lord Jesus is what we are talking about here.

I want to look at each word in particular and unpack some of this for us. The first word I want to talk about here and work my way backwards, from faith to fight. Faith.

Now, obviously, in common parlance, the first thing we think about faith is our personal, subjective faith and belief in Jesus Christ or maybe faith for one another and trusting in one another. But here, it's clearly a shorthand, as Paul does elsewhere in Timothy, as we'll see, for teaching or doctrine. For the faith is directed to Jesus, of course, and his teaching.

That is, trusting and relying upon Jesus is not just the person but also what he tells you, what we're called as believers, or in this case, pastors. And so it often is, in other words, faith is shorthand for the teachings of Jesus, of the doctrines of the Word of God. And that matches here the beginning of the book, as we saw elsewhere as well, where he has some repetition here in bookends from the beginning and at the end, as he finishes and winds up this letter to young Timothy.

We read in chapter 1, verse 19, having faith, he's urging Timothy, having faith in a good conscience which some have rejected concerning the faith, having suffered shipwrecked and the like, and teaching lies and heresies. He continues on to describe these people. Clearly there, the faith is belief in the truth of the gospel and things related to it.

Now, the faith here, in fact, the good fight of the faith, of the truth, of the doctrines of Jesus our Lord and Savior, of course, is more than just what's here in the book of Timothy. It's all the New Testament. Christ, through the power of the Spirit, has inspired all of them.

And the same Christ, also with the same Spirit, inspired the Old Testament as well. It's the entirety of the Bible at the end of the day. The great commission is, you know, go into all the world and teach them all that I've taught you.

That's the faith. It's a good fight. Not that Timothy is looking for a fight, looking for trouble.

It's not about personal grudges or spoiling for public debates with atheists. That's not what he's getting at here. It's clearly a metaphor.

It doesn't mean draw up the sword. But a spiritual contending. Instead, matters that warrant a public stance.

This is a letter, a public letter, to a public officer about public matters. He even names some of the wolves and heretics of the day being punished by the church, in fact. So he is charged to fight for these public matters that he is dealing with here of the faith of Jesus Christ and the truth that he has given the church.

That's his charge. As such, defending God's honor, for example, proclaiming Christ, defending the flock from false teachers and false instruction. These are the kind of good fights Timothy and all pastors likewise are urged unto here.

Fight this kind of a fight. Not a petty battle. Not a battle of war games, as we saw in the opening verses of chapter 6 here.

But the substance of the matter that dictates and requires a public defense, a public explanation, a public urging, a public contention, or contending for the faith here. This is what Timothy is called, and therefore, of course, all pastors and ministers called by Christ. Now, we are here at the very first word in the English fight.

Fight the good faith, the good fight of the faith, of the truth of God, a good battle when required and dictated by circumstances, to engage, even engage aggressively as needed. That's why he's using this metaphor to show us the seriousness of what the pastor's up to, what he's dealing with. Again, in chapter 1 of verse 18 of the same book, Paul writes, This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by then you may wage the good warfare.

There's that picture again. The battle of the church is not only your own battle, as we go over here in sanctification in Sunday School class, your own fight with the world, the flesh, and the devil. It's also a public battle, a public war against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

And the pastors are especially called to engage, to wage the good warfare, and not hold back, but to rather be bold in the Lord, God Almighty. Because presumably, Timothy may have been a little timid here, that's why he's urging him, because he was a young man. And young man, as I experienced, I used to be young once, believe it or not, around older ministers and church officers, not when truth is not when it comes to defending the flock.

You may have to stand firm against older men in the church and do the right thing. And so it's important to point this out, as we have a plethora, it seems to me, in my experience, an overabundance of church leaders not engaged in the fight of our times. And I don't mean necessarily the cultural wars that we used to talk about in the, I guess the 90s, the phrase came out, and kind of had in the 80s, that the moral majority, as you recall, and the like.

Although that has its place, of course, insofar as public murder and killing of babies should be denounced when appropriate. I recall one public pastor with a large ministry, made excuses for Christians to wear pride symbols at schools if they were teachers. He said, you can do it, you don't have to do it.

Another denied in public interview, that gays are judged by God for being homosexuals as such. It's like, that's not why they go to hell. That was just dumbstruck in these incidences.

The good news of Christ is watered down to Jesus has a wonderful plan for your life. That's an old adage in the American scene, unfortunately. That's just simply not always the case.

That's not the gospel anyways. That's why it's important. Here, I'm talking about fighting the good fight of the faith.

You can affirm it as a pastor, as a church, but if you're not contending in waging the good warfare to protect the flock, to warn the world, to wrestle with the devil, as it were, these public matters that are dangerous to the church of God and to unbelievers as well, of course, there's a problem. Now, what this fighting, this contending, does not look like. It is not being a troublemaker.

It's not the points. That's not their purpose, of course. Pastors are not called to be busybodies.

They are not called to be mean. I just want to be mean. That's just part of what it means to be a fighter, I guess, they think.

Of course, people may think that pastors are mean because they say, repent. That's wrong. That's sinful.

Well, that's between them and God. They are not objectively being mean. But it does look like.

We have plenty of examples in the Bible. We have the life of Jesus. We have the apostles.

And to the extent that they did things that we can do that are not miraculous, ordinary things, to that extent, they are teaching us by their examples of what we can do as well, again, given the circumstances. Sometimes people like to turn one thing that the apostle does or Jesus does into a hammer and everything becomes a nail. Every circumstance requires me hammering and just always engaging and fighting.

No, no, no, no. That's not what's being called here. Jesus, of course, was in his ministry, public ministry, bold and even blunt at times.

He called the church leadership hypocrites. The apostles did the same thing. They stood firm.

And they were open and truthful and said what needed to be said and warned people and, of course, at the same time, encouraged people and urged them to follow Jesus. Standing for the truth of God's word, specifically the law and gospel, of course, pastors like Timothy are called to do. Teaching, preaching, explaining, encouraging.

It doesn't always have to be negative. You can be engaged or fighting for the good conscience of God's saints, to protect them from lies, to tell them no, Jesus does love you. Quit looking at your sins.

I know you hear people outside the church, for example, telling you just give up. Everything you do is just miserable. That's what depravity means.

Well, yeah, there's a lot of truth to that to be sure, but we're born again. God has overcome our sins. You don't have to give up and say it's always about my sins.

It's about Jesus and God is indeed working in you both to will and do his good pleasure. We should rejoice in that and be happy, for example. And so that is, as it were, a more positive engagement to encourage the saints of God almighty.

And it's not just outward facing. The call here to fight the good fight to young Timothy, by extension, all pastors of all times, is not external only, not against lies and attacks outside the church only. That is part of it.

And that's, of course, an important part to the extent that the world knows we exist and they're coming after us, but also inwardly, helping the saints, protecting and encouraging, as I gave an illustration earlier. Contending for the truth, of course, is not always glamorous. The hard work of preaching and teaching and writing and everything done in the background is part of this fight.

Sometimes people, I suppose, read this, maybe young men, fight the good fight. The first thing they think of is what can I do publicly to engage and get the attention of the world upon God or Christ, but then put the hard work behind the scenes of knowing their topic, for example, the theological issue they're debating or the practices or whatever else the case is on hand before they engage. Everything's involved in the fight, in other words.

All the means, causes, and occasions unto it. It continues here. Fight the good fight of the faith.

Lay hold upon eternal life to which you were also called and have confessed a good confession in the presence of many witnesses. Lay hold of eternal life. Keep trusting Jesus for salvation.

Don't give up on that fact, of course. We are called not only to a life of repentance but a life of trusting and believing in Jesus. He confessed the good confession, probably his ordination.

This is Timothy, a pastor. One of the unique things that he went through as he read in 1 Timothy was he was ordained by the presbytery, laying on of hands of the presbytery, of the church officers of the regional church, and even given a prophecy, apparently, or a teaching on what he is called to do and as such, given this public office, it's therefore an office to stand and fight for the truth and thus, in his ordination, he would have a confession or a promise, what? To do his duty. That's what I did.

We were sworn into the office publicly and I take it seriously. I take the call of a pastor seriously. I take what it means to contend for the faith as a matter of what it means to be a minister, part and parcel, not something that's optional.

And so, Paul, in other words, you were ordained with the holy office to fight for Jesus is what he's saying here. But what about you? You're not a pastor. You're not a church officer.

Christians fight in a similar fashion but, of course, often less publicly. Christians fight the good fight when they confess Christ before men as opportunity arises, stand up for the truth when Jesus is being smeared or lied about, or God and his church, instruct your family, your friends, and your coworkers in the truth of God's word. Again, as opportunity arises, first Peter, be able to give an answer to the hope that is within you.

That's expressed more passively. As things come along in your life, people ask, where were you Sunday? That's one of the easier ones, right? Well, I was at church. Church? What's that? What church do you go to? Why would you go there? There's your door.

Wide open. Say something. You don't have to be a pastor and go out there and looking for people to talk to and preach and the like.

They come to you in many regards in this way. And of course, it's not just instruction of the truth of the gospel, of who Jesus is, to sit down and going through a booklet, perhaps, summarizing biblical truth, a catechism, for example, but also practices. Continuing for the faith here, the faith would include what Christ requires of the church, like baptism, the Lord's Supper, a holy living.

These are also part of instruction. You teach about a holy living. You don't just teach about what you're supposed to believe, but also what you're supposed to, what? Do with said belief.

And so, of course, Timothy's supposed to do that, but you too are called in your fight, fighting the good fight of the faith involves not just instruction, but the call to obedience. Saying no to sin and transgressions of God's holy law is part of that fight as well. It's more private, of course.

That's the more narrow picture of sanctification. That's your battle. That's the pastor's battle as well.

He has that in addition to the public battle. To say no to his own temptations. You have to say no to your own temptations.

And yes to Christ Jesus working in your life, holiness and righteousness. And again, you may be more aggressive or less aggressive in these endeavors depending on who you're talking to and under what circumstances to be sure. But in my mind, it's a toolbox.

Let's put it this way. I've mentioned this a few times in the past going through here. You have a toolbox of how to respond with what intensity given what circumstance.

We should not forget that one of the tools we're given is an aggressive tool. A tool of zeal is the translation they're off in the New Testament. To be zealous for the truth and zealous for Christ's honor.

There's a time for that. Don't hold back if that's what's called for you. Now Paul, as a reminder here, uses a lot of different metaphors in describing the Christian walk.

And of course, here in Timothy's public walk as a Christian, sport metaphor, exercise metaphor, beating the air. And here we have the martial metaphor, warfare, to remind us that following Christ is one, hard work, not a walk in the park. Two, it is serious work.

We're supposed to put our mind behind it, our whole heart and soul as situations arise. And of course, we have rest time and the like, which is good because we can only focus so hard and so long in our life. But when it comes to fighting sin and standing for righteousness, of contending for the truth, defending God's honor, we have to realize it's not something we can just deal and do flippantly.

Just kind of like at the last minute if we feel like it. But also rewarding. Because in a godly battle and a just war, I speak of real war, not the metaphorical or the spiritual warfare he described here.

It is a blessing to finally finish it and exercise justice to defend your country. It's hard. You're bloodied and beaten down.

But it's rewarding in that sense that it's finally being accomplished that this injustice in which they murdered our country and our fellow man, my family, has been vindicated in God's providence. And so it is with our spiritual growth as we grow in grace and kill our enemy within our hearts. Keep the commandment.

Keep the Commandment

Verses 13 to 16. I urge you. Here, it's more explicit. He says fight. He's basically urging him to fight. Now he says it more overtly.

I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things and before Christ Jesus who witnesses the good confession before Pontius Pilate that you keep this commandment. Paul's urging here in verse 13 is an important urging. I urge you not just any old I, not just another member of the church, but the Apostle of Jesus Christ urging him.

That's a serious responsibility. Timothy's going to feel here. But it's more than that.

It's in the sight of God. And before Christ Jesus is a divine urging. He's calling upon the Lord God to witness of the importance of his calling as a pastor to what? Verse 14.

Don't lose the purpose here. So you have the verb. I urge and to what end? That you keep the commandment.

He says a lot of things in the middle. Paul does this often. He has what we call a lot of dependent clauses hanging off the main idea.

And you've got to wait a minute. Get back to the main idea again eventually in the sentence elsewhere. Verse 14 does.

That you keep this commandment. The importance of this commandment. Of keeping it.

It's so important. He urges in the sight of God and before Christ Jesus do it. Don't give up.

Guard the truth. Stand for it. Implying that Timothy should and can do no less.

And just as he had a confession and so Christ had his confession before Pontius Pilate. And so he's urging him indirectly follow the example of Christ to stand firm upon the truth no matter who your adversary is. In this case a man who is willing to kill Jesus.

Urging to keep the commandments is the point here of why he calls upon God Almighty as a witness like swearing an oath. To keep the commandment. The commandment.

Probably what was written before as in the end of the book all that he wrote up to this point the whole unit is conceived of as singular. Everything I wrote here up to the end of this book I'm treating as a commandment. Do all these things.

Keep it. Don't drop it. And guard it.

Keep, guard, preserve, and do of course not just keeping it safe in the closet. This is a nice precious book of the Bible. I'm going to put it over here and never deal with it again.

That's not what he means by keep. Keep is clearly another metaphor. A picture of describing the preciousness of the commandments of God given by the power of the Spirit through the Apostle Paul to King Timothy and of course by extension from him to all pastors from then on out and to you guys indirectly insofar as Timothy is still a Christian and has to do Christian things like you have to do.

And so keeping is again not just the doctrine in the head but the doctrine in the hands as well because he tells him things to do not just things to believe as well in this letter. In other words, fight the good fight also means keeping the truth of God. I urge you that you keep this commandment as another way of describing fight the good fight of the faith.

So Paul's being emphatic. And therefore to know the truth is important in this matter. How can you contend and stand for Jesus and keep the commandments if you and the pastors and the churches are deadly ignorant? You're just happy with where you are in church.

You're just kind of getting through life as we talked about in Sunday School class. You're just existing but you're not existing and thriving and growing beyond what it means to be a babe in Christ. This is required of this fact.

Keep out, he says. Keep this commandment but keep out or without spot blameless until Christ return or his appearing here for his people a second time. Without spot, of course, is to be clean.

Here, morally clean not just physically clean although I hope you stay physically clean. To preserve in spotlessness until Christ returns. It's a call of all pastors.

It's important that therefore we ordain upright men who have shown by their public example and examination that they are sanctified by the Holy Spirit and thus cannot and will not I speak as a man ordinarily bring scandal upon the church. We all know we can all think of all these terrible horrid scandals in the church and these pastors doing crazy things. I ran across a couple more recently, in fact.

I don't mean evangelical circles either. They're much bigger than we are so the odds, of course, would be greater if they're gonna find more scandals. Just the nature of the case.

But the more you examine some of these cases and unfortunately it's hard to do because I can imagine churches are embarrassed and they don't want to give a lot of facts. But in these cases in which they are breaking the seventh commandment in both cases they were clearly in situations they shouldn't have been in the church apparently turned blind-eyed. In other words, it doesn't have to happen as much as it seems to be happening sometimes.

We can push a little harder and further our sanctification as a church and demand a high standard for our pastors that they would indeed be upright and spotless. Again, relatively speaking we know there are struggles but he means especially publicly spotless. And you can and there have been.

We forget this. God has blessed the church with pastors over the centuries who have stayed out of public scandals. They haven't run around sleeping with another man's wife.

Stole from the treasury. Things like that. Now they had other problems maybe, certainly because they're sinners but not the kind of public scandals we're talking about here.

Here, Paul is not in other words calling Timothy to an impossible life. That's another way of looking at it. He's guided by the Spirit and he would not taunt Timothy with something that could not be done.

So next, as Paul often does when referring to Christ that you keep the commandments without spot. Blame us and tell our Lord Jesus Christ appearing. I'm talking about Christ.

And so he manifests as an old time. This is the same Christ who I think is a wonderful Lord and Savior. He is blessed and only potentent.

The King of Kings and Lord of Lords who alone is immortality dwelling in unapproachable light who no man has seen or can seen to whom the honor and everlasting power. Amen. He turns an exhortation and an urging of young Timothy into a doxology.

Right at the end there. He could have ended it and said without spot. Blame us and tell the Lord Jesus Christ appearing.

Done. But he continues on blessed and King of Kings and Lord of Lords as a glorious God and Savior. It's a doxology or a theology of praise.

Praising of God Almighty. Several items about Jesus therefore here in this list. Christ's return is in his own time.

Not our time. And therefore we are called to be patient and to persevere. That is in the call to keep the commandments that all that Paul has told Timothy and all pastors and all of us of course to the extent that we can imitate these things.

Without spot and blameless that is an increasing sanctification and holiness is another way of saying don't give up. Keep it up until Christ comes. Don't think he's going to come around the corner which seems to be some of the problems dealt with in the early church where Paul tells them no, no it hasn't happened yet.

The son of perdition has not occurred yet. So you have to keep persevering. It's not the end yet.

Don't give up. In Christ he describes here in the remaining part of verses 15 and 16 with one long sentence. Blessed and only potentate.

Potentate is a ruler or sovereign ruler. A leader. The highest authority of the land.

Of course it's the highest authority of all things of all creation. King of kings and lord of lords. So he's emphasizing what kind of potentate he is.

The highest authority above all authorities. Then at the time in the ancient Near East of course the kings and the lords were the greatest power of their own nation. There were prideful kings and lords and there were many of them.

They weren't satisfied with that and would go to war to try to prove that they were the lord of all the earth. Hence the Roman Empire. But they still didn't have the whole earth did they? So they were still one of many nations that have a potentate.

That have the highest authority of their land. And Paul is describing Jesus Christ the lord, our savior, as the king over all these kings. As the lord over all these lords.

Of the entirety of the earth. Our god is not a local god. The pagans of that day had local gods.

We forget that. Baal was their local god. It didn't necessarily have to be the Egyptian god.

It didn't have to be the Ethiopian god. They had other gods. Sometimes they were similar and had a different name but it was still their god that was dealing with them locally.

And we have said over and over again we the Christian church, the Jewish church, the Old Testament church there as well and the Psalms especially that the whole earth is the lords. He is over all and they are under him. A rebellion to be sure.

And he laughs at them for it because they cannot stop him. But he is in charge and over all. And this clearly is a picture of Christ Jesus as god.

Go through the elements here. It highlights all the more that Jesus Christ is god. He is both god and man but he is highlighting here his divine nature.

Who alone has immortality We don't have it native to us being immortal. Death comes our way. But we also know the spirit and the father are immortal.

And thus we see here implicitly the trinity there. Jesus Christ, the second member of the trinity is not the Holy Spirit, is not the father but he has a common nature with them. A divine nature.

The godhead. As all three share into that one godhead. And so immortality is native to all three of them.

And he continues here. Dwelling in an unapproachable light whom no man has seen or can see. Light often is a picture of truth and knowledge that he is a source of all these things and that we are but in the darkness unless we have his light we cannot see the light.

But also a picture of holiness and righteousness as well. For the two go hand in hand. And god above.

And that therefore no mere mortal can approach him without his grace and mercy upon them. We are inferior to god almighty who is an inapproachable light. We can only approach him if he so deigns by his grace to allow us into his presence by the blood of Christ.

Christ is therefore owed much honor, praise, and adoration. Even as Jesus has everlasting power, we read at the end. To whom be honor and everlasting power.

Not as though he's saying I'm going to give him honor and power but he owns and possesses all this power and honor. Even everlasting infinite power. Which again is not native to the human condition.

He's referring to his divine nature. One person and two natures. The god man.

These two verses tell us therefore that Jesus is worthy of the same honor as the father and as the holy spirit. That there is a trinity and that Jesus is divine. But what does all that mean? Why did Paul go down this divine bunny trail you can call it.

A wonderful bunny trail to be sure. That the lord Jesus with all his might and glory is there for you equipping you with his spirit and that the call here to fight and the urging upon Timothy and the pastors to keep the commandments without spot is not impossible because God almighty is with them. The son of God.

And even with you brothers and sisters you too can fight the good fight of the faith. Amen.
Let us pray.

And so lord Jesus continue to use your power and your might to purify us in our battle to keep the commandments that you have given us in the word of God. To fight the good fight in our own lives we pray. That we would persevere therein and have comfort and hope and joy as Paul does here in which he is yearning for the return of our lord and savior who is the blessed and only potentent king of kings and lord of lords with everlasting power given to our good.

We ask these things in your name. Amen.