

I'll be reading from 1st Timothy chapter 6 verses 11 through 16.

Fight the good fight of faith.

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

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

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.

which he will display at the proper time.

He who is blessed and only sovereign, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see, to him be the honor and eternal dominion.

Amen.

Thanks, Lee.

So I want to start this morning by showing you a picture.

It might be a familiar picture to some of you if you grew up in the 90s playing video games.

This is a picture of four kids, and they're playing on their Game Boy, and they've gotten stuck at a level that they can't defeat.

And so what do they do?

Well, they call Mom, because they know Mom can fight for them, and so she's playing that level for them.

And that's really the picture that we're going to see this morning.

Now, I have to be honest that this isn't a picture from my own childhood, because my mom would not have been a lot of help in this particular situation.

But I'm sure you can remember a time in your life when, especially as a child, you came across something that just seemed insurmountable.

And what was your only recourse?

It was to find mom or dad and have them do it for you.

So that's what we're going to be thinking about today.

Timothy has a great fight to fight.

Paul is going to give Timothy and us some big charges.

And we might be tempted to think that we can accomplish these things in our own strength.

But that's just simply not true.

In video games, we might call this the final boss battle, right?

And so Timothy has to recognize as he approaches this, that it's in God's strength and God's ability that's fighting for him.

Just like the kids in that picture, he has to recognize his inability and he needs to rely on God.

So we're gonna see today that we fight the good fight in the power of Jesus.

Paul gives Timothy four charges or commands to flee, follow, fight, and fasten onto.

And this first one is to flee.

Paul tells Timothy to flee from false teaching and false attitudes.

Verse 11 says,

Paul begins this section by drawing a contrast between the false teachers, whom he had indicted in the previous verses, and Timothy, who's a man of God.

So if you are a man or a woman of God here today, these charges are for you too.

We must begin by fleeing these things.

So what are these things that we are to flee from?

What should the man or woman of God run away from?

Well, these things are the attitudes and the actions of the false teachers that Paul has just spoken about, that we worked through last Sunday.

And really, we've seen this coming up over and over again in this book, right?

These things that the false teachers were teaching and believing.

So let's just review some of those things.

Paul has said that they were devoting themselves to myths and genealogies, promoting speculation, wandering into vain discussions.

They didn't understand the law, but they taught about it confidently.

They shipwrecked their faith.

They devoted themselves to deceitful, demonic teaching.

They were insincere liars.

They were forbidding marriage, teaching asceticism.

They did not teach a doctrine that aligned with Christ and godliness.

They were puffed up with conceit, but understood nothing.

They had unhealthy cravings for controversy and quarrels.

They encouraged envy and dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and even friction between people.

They used a front of godliness to get material gain, loving money.

These are the things that Timothy and we are to flee from.

And this false teaching and the ungodly desires that produce it were plaguing Timothy's congregation.

And we also are bombarded every day with false thinking and understanding.

We see people that claim to be Christians, claim to preach the gospel, but when we examine their preaching and their lifestyles, it becomes clear that they are proclaiming a false gospel.

We are also tempted by ungodly desires.

We live in a society that enjoys drama and contention and fighting.

How often have you found yourself sucked into reality TV or political debates that really encourage these kinds of things?

And we are told that money is the best thing that we can pursue, that we should make ourselves happy.

But we are in this world surrounded by this false teaching and ungodly desires and attitudes.

And we may feel the pull to conform to the world, but we are to flee these things.

Paul wants Timothy's life to be marked by godliness as opposed to the false teachers.

And he even said in verse three of this chapter that sound teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ produces godliness.

If Timothy flirts with these false things, he puts that pursuit of godliness at risk.

If we begin to adopt these worldly attitudes, we are no longer chasing down godliness.

So when we feel them rising in our hearts, we must flee.

Some things we are to fight, but some things we are just supposed to run from.

Paul tells us to flee from idolatry in 1 Corinthians 10.14, to flee from sexual immorality in 1 Corinthians 6.18.

In his second letter to Timothy, he will tell him to flee from youthful lusts.

And the life of Joseph actually gives us a really good visual of what this kind of fleeing looks like.

Remember, Joseph's brothers had sold him into slavery.

And he was there in his master Potiphar's house, and he was faithful, and so he became the head of the house.

But one day, Potiphar's wife was alone with Joseph, and she asked him to lie with her.

So what was Joseph's response?

Did he remain in the room and try to reason with her as to why he shouldn't lie with her?

Did he maybe try to get as close to his sin without crossing a line as he could?

Did he just stand there and keep telling her why it was so wrong that she were to ask him something like that?

No, he just simply fled and he left the house.

He made no room for her advances to take hold.

Paul is reminding Timothy of the alluring nature of false teaching.

These false teachers loved money, so they probably led pretty lavish lifestyles that Timothy could have been jealous of.

They must have had a following, and Timothy might have wished that his ministry was just as popular.

But Paul is saying, pay them no mind, don't pay attention, just flee.

So how do we respond when we come across false teaching in a podcast or on YouTube or on Instagram or TikTok?

What do we do when we feel ourselves loving money and power and recognition or even enjoying the division and strife that are around us?

Well, if you look at the private jets and the sports cars of false teachers, or the mansions of the rich and famous, or maybe even just your neighbor's house that's bigger than yours and his car that's better than yours, and you feel that pang of jealousy rising in your heart, flee.

Turn off the phone, open the Bible, read about Christ's humility.

When you see a false teaching receiving clout in an audience, close the laptop, open your Bible, remind yourself of Jesus' words in Matthew 7.

He said, enter by the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.

For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

When you see other people in your field receiving recognition that you think you deserve, remember that your rewards are in heaven and you work as to God and not as to man.

When you feel yourself going down the YouTube or podcast rabbit hole into some absurd theories and you start to think about yourself as the select few privy to some special knowledge, shut it down, read about a faithful brother or sister in Christ who's gone before you.

When you feel a pull towards selfish ambition in your own ministry or your work, reorient yourself, right?

When you begin to think too highly of yourself and your accomplishments, read what Jesus said in Matthew 20.

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, that their great ones exercise authority over them.

It shall not be so among you.

The son of man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

If you find yourself getting caught up in endless political or theological debate where no one's really listening to each other, then turn it off.

Don't feed the monster of controversy.

So that's the first charge, to flee.

And next, Paul tells Timothy to follow godliness.

And follow might be a little bit of a softer word than the word Paul uses, which is pursue, but all of these are gonna start with F, so it's gonna help us to remember.

But keep in mind, this is an active pursuit, like a cheetah hunting down its prey.

We are to pursue righteousness, to pursue godliness, pursue faith, pursue steadfastness, pursue gentleness.

Paul is, again, drawing a contrast to the false teachers.

They don't pursue these things.

They pursue selfish ambition and greedy gain and division.

But the things Paul calls Timothy to pursue are all outward facing.

Sometimes we respond to a list like this by becoming really introspective.

We say, okay, well, I'll work really hard to be righteous.

Or I'll be faithful and I'll be unmoving.

Aye, aye, aye.

Instead, we should be turned outward, right?

Are we pursuing righteousness in how we treat others?

Are we working to see that those around us are treated fairly?

Are we treating others in an upright way?

Or do we show favoritism?

Or do we say, well, you know, I'll scratch your back if you'll scratch mine?

Do we pursue godliness?

Or another word to say this word is piety.

Are we living humble lives in reverence to God, in submission to him?

We should not live lives devoted to our wants and desires, establishing ourselves as the God of our own lives.

We should pursue faithfulness.

Is your trust and confidence in yourself or in God, in your word or in his?

We should pursue love, and true godly love in our lives is always outward facing.

The false teachers, in contrast, were obsessed and really in love with themselves.

Do you know the story of Narcissus?

This is where we get the word narcissist from.

He's this young boy, and he's given beauty.

And usually in Greek mythology, when somebody's given beauty, it comes with a lot of negative side effects, and people get jealous of them, they usually get killed, or their loved ones get killed.

But Narcissus is different.

He's given beauty and happiness and contentment, but the catch that he can never see his own beauty, he can never become aware of the fact that he's beautiful.

But one day he catches his reflection in the water, and he becomes so enamored with himself, he gets closer and closer and closer until he drowns in his own reflection.

And that's the picture of the false teachers.

But we, on the other hand, right, should be facing out toward others, seeing how we can meet their needs and how we can love them as Christ has loved us.

We should pursue steadfastness as we are tested and persecuted for righteousness' sake.

Think about Jesus at his trial.

He did not retaliate in anger, but he humbly persevered.

And we are called to be steadfast like this.

Lastly, we should pursue gentleness.

And think about what Timothy is up against, right?

False teaching.

When you come across false teaching, do you react gently?

This is not what we see modeled for us in politics or in the media.

I wouldn't use gentle to describe a lot of those interactions.

And Paul has spoken firmly against the false teaching, but overall he wants Timothy's attitude to be confidently gentle.

And gentleness is not weakness.

It really comes out of a great confidence in the truth, so much so that we don't need to become unnecessarily riled up and betray our audience's trust as we defend the truth.

And again, let's think about Timothy's context.

He's a young pastor in Ephesus.

His congregation is facing opposition to the truth from these false teachers who are after their own glory and gain.

He's been told to flee their attitudes, to pursue and follow godliness instead.

And now he is told to fight.

Verse 12 says, fight the good fight of the faith.

If we're honest with ourselves, we've probably taken this verse out of context at some point, because it makes for a really good soundbite, right?

Fight the good fight.

But we really need to think about what does that mean?

What does that look like, to fight the good fight?

Well, the object of this fight is really important.

It's not a picture of a boxer in a ring.

Timothy isn't fighting the false teachers themselves.

This is not a fight against something, it's a fight for something.

He is fighting for his faith.

Our faith is something we fight for.

Timothy's ultimate battle is not with the false teachers, but for his own faithfulness.

And this is not a battle that only pastors face, right?

Each of us is tempted to give in, each of us is tempted to make concessions in our lives, but we must fight for our faith.

as you battle sin and temptation, lethargy, and even the call of the world to make yourself happy before all else, fight.

And I'm not calling you to take up arms against those who don't preach the truth.

I'm asking you to look at Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, and to keep going.

And when you feel too tired, like you can't keep running anymore, look to him and keep fighting.

Before we move on to the last imperative, I want to draw your attention to one word, good.

Some fights are wrong, but to fight for our faith, our continued faith each day in the truth is a good fight.

And the next part of verse 12 also informs us as to what exactly it is that we're fighting for.

Are we fighting for a world in which everyone agrees with us?

Are we fighting for a world in which no one questions our beliefs?

Or when everyone does what we think that they should do?

Of course not.

We are fighting for our faith.

The false teachers were after those kinds of things.

They wanted to be made great.

But instead we fight to remain faithful all the way to the end.

The rest of verse 12 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.

This is a personal fight in the heart of Timothy.

It's a fight that results in an assurance of faith and continued faithfulness.

Now we're beginning to see this fight more clearly.

This is really a fight for Timothy's heart.

False teaching is never something that's merely intellectual or external, right?

It always happens and it's always coming out of a depraved and wicked heart.

So Timothy is to guard himself against not merely just saying wrong things, but believing and loving wrong things.

Timothy has been told to flee false attitudes, to follow godly ones, to fight for his faith,

And now he's told to take fast, to fasten onto, to take hold of eternal life.

This world is full of distractions and lesser joys, but it is in eternity that we find ultimate fulfillment.

The false teachers were trying to find fulfillment here and now, but that is not where Timothy's faith is placed.

His hope is in his eternal life with Jesus.

Is that where you're placing your greatest hope?

Is that what you're holding on to?

Paul tells us to grab hold of eternal life and don't for anything let go.

The Odyssey actually gives us a really good picture of this.

So Odysseus is on a ship and he's about to approach the waters where he knows sirens are.

And sirens are these evil creatures that look beautiful and call out beautiful false promises to sailors and lure them to their deaths.

And so he responds by asking his shipmates to pack his ears full of wax so he won't be able to hear their calls.

And so he's really fleeing from those temptations, right?

And then he has the men wrap him with ropes around the mast of the ship.

So try as he might, he wouldn't even be able to pursue them into the water.

He's holding fast to that ship that he knows will get him through those tempting waters.

And that's the picture that we have, right?

We know that the sirens of false teaching and worldly wisdom are alluring.

They tempt us with all kinds of false promises.

But we must flee from their calls and hold fast to Christ's promises.

Paul also reminds Timothy that he doesn't take hold of eternal life on his own.

First of all, Timothy was called into this eternal life.

God has called his children into this relationship.

It's not something that originated with Timothy, and so therefore it's not something that's dependent on him either.

Also, Paul reminds him that he confessed the faith before man.

And we're about to see God and Jesus serve as witnesses to this confession also.

It is through their power that he will persevere.

We make our confession in front of the church, and then we hold one another accountable to that confession in the presence of God.

So that's the first point.

That's the charge.

Timothy is called to flee and follow and fight and fasten onto.

And it seems like a daunting task, right?

There's a lot of imperatives in there.

But that's not where Paul stops, right?

He doesn't leave Timothy with this giant task and no means to accomplish it.

He moves next into this glorious doxology, extolling the majesty of God, the Father, and Jesus.

He is showing Timothy that it is God who has the power to accomplish these things in Timothy's life.

We flee in the power of Jesus, right?

We follow in the power of Jesus.

We fight in the power of Jesus and we take hold of the eternal life, that hope that we have through the power of Jesus.

Paul says the same thing to the Philippians, in Philippians 2.13, right?

He says, work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

That's just what he's called Timothy to do, right?

To keep holds, to work out this faith, keep going in it.

But then he says, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

So we've considered the charge in detail, and now I just want you to sit back and take in the power that works that out in your life.

We're going to take a look at each of these reasons that Timothy is empowered to keep the faith.

But notice that in the middle of this doxology in verse 14, Paul returns back to Timothy's charge.

He says, to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach.

So throughout this praise of God, Timothy is being given the strength to follow and flee and fight and fasten onto.

So Paul says in verse 13,

I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things.

Timothy can hold fast to eternal life because God is with him.

He made his confession before others and in the presence of God.

And we'll see in a moment that Jesus also bears witness to this confession.

And remember that as a church, anything we do is accomplished in the presence of Jesus.

Because as he left his last instructions to his disciples to build his church, he ends those instructions by saying, and behold, I am with you always to the end of the age.

So God is with Timothy.

And what's more, Timothy can hold on to eternal life because it is God who gives us life in the first place.

And we know that God is the giver of life.

He breathed life into Adam.

He even says in Deuteronomy 32, 39, see now that I, even I am he, there is no God beside me.

I kill and I make alive.

Likewise, Jesus says in John 10, 10, I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

Even John 3, 16 comes to mind.

Those who believe in him have eternal life.

God is the giver of life.

So if Timothy has any hope to hold on to the hope of eternal life, it has to be done in the presence and the power of the God who gives life.

Next, Paul says that this fight is,

And this charge is done in the presence of Jesus.

And this begins this really beautiful exaltation of the person and the work of Jesus.

All of the rest of this is about him.

He says in 13, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession.

Jesus made the good confession before Pilate.

In the most trying moment of his life, Jesus maintained his confession that he was the king of the Jews, their Messiah, our Messiah.

He came to live a holy life, to die an unjust death,

And in the midst of that horrific pain, he didn't waver.

He held fast to that confession.

And so Paul's connecting Timothy's confession that he mentioned in verse 12 with Jesus' confession.

Timothy's confession must be persevered in just as Jesus persevered in his.

And Paul says that not only did Jesus persevere in his confession, but that he's returning, right?

14 and 15 say, to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will display at the proper time.

As we work in this life, we must remember that Jesus is returning.

And many of Jesus' parables have this application.

When he returns to us, what will he find us doing?

keeping the faith, fighting the fight, pursuing godliness?

Let that be so.

And let Jesus' perfect example and his imminent return motivate us to keep doing these things.

Next, Paul points out Jesus' sovereignty.

He says, he who is blessed and the only sovereign, the king of kings and the Lord of lords.

So not only is Jesus the one who persevered and not only is Jesus the one who's returned, but he is the one who's ruling over the universe and ruling over your life.

How do we hold fast when life seems out of control, when things don't seem to be going the way that we think they should go, when we're unsure?

We can fight and we can take hold because we can trust that Jesus is ruling in all of these things.

We can trust that he is the perfect ruler, even when things make little sense.

And this is how we fight the fight.

So God gives us life, Jesus persevered, he's coming back, he's in control, and he alone has immortality.

16 says, 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.

So how can we hold on to eternal life?

Well, because Jesus is with us and he alone is immortal.

And just think about that word immortal means, right?

It really means the opposite of death, right?

He is the one who has defeated death and is life.

And so he's the very opposite of death.

And because he rose from the dead, he now gives us that immortality, that life.

He shares that with those who believe in him.

And this is how we fight the fight.

Paul goes on to say that Jesus is unapproachably bright, right?

He who dwells in unapproachable light whom no one has ever seen or can see.

Jesus is both holy and beautiful.

With each description, we are seeing the glorious nature of Jesus more clearly.

He is holy.

He is set apart, unapproachable, and in that glory, he shines.

And do you see what Paul is doing for Timothy?

He has told him that there's this great battle for his faith, that he has to fight.

And if he tried to pursue it in his own strength, he would certainly fail.

But God is the one who works in Timothy to fight this fight.

And how do we know that God will be any better at it than Timothy?

Well, because God is not like Timothy.

God is holy.

Because Jesus is set apart.

So Timothy can hold on to eternal life.

He can fight the good fight only because God who gives us life is with us.

Because Jesus persevered.

Because Jesus is coming again.

Because Jesus is sovereign.

Because Jesus alone has immortality.

Because Jesus is beautiful and holy.

And this life-giving, beautiful, holy God is with Timothy, working on his behalf.

Paul is layering magnificent truth onto magnificent truth here.

And we ought to be so encouraged, right, by this exaltation of Jesus.

And so Paul ends it by saying to him, be honor and eternal dominion, amen.

What other response do we have?

We must stand in awe of Jesus and praise him.

We must honor and glorify Him.

We give Him honor and we even recognize His dominion.

He has the authority and the control of our lives.

We understand that He possesses the power that we don't have but need to fight this fight.

In essence, just like that picture at the beginning, we are unable in our own strength to fight this fight.

And so we turn to the one who can fight it in and through and for us so that we may keep the faith.

So Timothy, and by extension we, have been given some serious charges.

And I don't want you to misunderstand me when I say that Jesus is the one with the power to do these things.

Just as Paul told the Philippians to work out their salvation, we still have to follow and flee and fight and fasten onto it.

But we are not alone.

First, we have one another, right?

Timothy made this confession in front of the church.

So we hold one another.

We tell one another, keep going, keep fighting.

When we see someone who might be struggling, we tell them and encourage them to keep going, keep looking to Jesus.

Also, Timothy has Jesus and the Father and the Holy Spirit who are at work in him.

In addition to all that, it's a fight worth fighting.

This is a life worth pursuing.

This is a hope worth holding onto.

Sure, Timothy might have been tempted to think, you know, those false teachers are really amassing a big influence.

Maybe I'm the crazy one.

Maybe they're onto something that I'm not.

Maybe they're right.

And aren't we tempted like that?

Don't we look around us and say, am I the only one who gets it?

Right?

Am I the crazy one?

Am I missing something?

Maybe the world is right and this is all that there is and I should just make myself happy.

But Paul has given Timothy to fight that pull

is this glorious picture of Jesus.

He says to Timothy, don't lose heart, keep fighting, keep going, it's worth it.

If your congregation dwindles, but those who remain are faithful to the truth, it's worth it.

If you live this life without great wealth or power or influence or position, it's worth it.

And it's worth it because of the surpassing glory we see in Jesus.

We look to him.

He stood before Pilate.

He is with you.

He gives you life.

He rose from the dead.

He's ruling over everything.

He is great and exalted and lifted up, so don't take your eyes off of him for a second.

He is fighting for you.

Devote everything you have to him because it's worth it.

And he will keep you in this fight.

The hymn, O Sacred Head Now Wounded, that we sing at Easter time, really helps us put words to this attitude.

It says, what language shall I borrow to thank thee, dearest friend?

For this, thy dying sorrow, thy pity without end.

O make me thine forever, and should I faintly be, Lord, let me never, never outlive my love to thee.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, thank you for these wonderful promises and pictures of you.

Thank you for your ability to fight for us, that we might hold fast, that we might pursue you, that we might follow in what you have for us.

Thank you for fighting on our behalf.

and help us to keep that picture in mind and to remind ourselves and remind each other as we fight this fight together that you are in control of our lives, that you have done all of these things.

Let us respond to all of this truth this morning with thankfulness in our hearts.

Amen.

Amen.