

## **Flee and Pursue**

Call to Worship: Psalm 18:1-3

1st Scripture: 1 Timothy 6:1-10

2nd Scripture: 1 Timothy 6:11-12

Hymn #81- *A Mighty Fortress*

Hymn #690- *Jesus Paid it All*

Hymn #700- *Trust and Obey*

### **Introduction**

Having warned Timothy about the ulterior motives of the false teachers who have infiltrated the church at Ephesus with dangerous teachings, exposing their greedy intentions of increasing their personal wealth and material gain, last time, we saw how Paul further cautioned Timothy about the lethal trap of being swept away by a desire for money and material gain. For, those who covet and pursue wealth, rather than finding fulfillment and increased joy, actually wind up traveling down a path that leads to being overcome by many foolish and harmful lusts that drown men in destruction and perdition, and they pierce themselves through with many sorrows.

Contrary to a pursuit of wealth, Paul has also stated that godliness *with contentment* is a source of true and lasting gain, as it brings about benefits that exceed the grave, and travel into eternity. This morning then, Paul will add to this assertion, exhorting Timothy to invest his life, in a pursuit of godly virtues, which reap eternal benefits.

### **I. Flee and Pursue**

Moving away then, from the negative and harmful pursuit of wealth, Paul then positively exhorts Timothy in the following way: "But you, O man of God (contrary to these false teachers with wicked, self-destructive motives); But you, O man of God (honored by and genuinely serving the living God, unlike those who are ultimately selfish "men of themselves"), flee these things (flee the covetous trap of desiring and pursuing money and wealth) and (rather) pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness."

And so, here Paul provides Timothy with a non-exhaustive list of virtues, which Timothy ought to direct his attention toward pursuing, instead of wealth. Indeed, he is to "flee" rather than "pursue" the one thing, so that he can "pursue" these others. He is to flee the natural, fallen

desire for material wealth, so that he might consciously pursue the unnatural, but godly desire to increase in these immaterial, and yet, soul-profiting virtues. Let us, therefore, briefly consider each of the virtues that are mentioned here, before moving into verse 12. And again, let me just note, that this is not an exhaustive (or complete) list that Paul provides for Timothy here. In other words, he is not saying to pursue *only* these things, but rather, he is providing a general description of the types of things that Timothy should be pursuing, which are worthy of his time and investment. For example, one might add "self-control" to this list, along with other virtues and fruits of the Spirit, mentioned elsewhere (although "righteousness" might also provide a general and broad summation of those other virtues, not specifically listed here, as well). That said, let us consider the specific virtues listed here, then:

1) Righteousness: In an obvious, but non-meritorious sense, righteousness here, simply implies improving upon our obedience to the commands of Christ. Although, we are already declared righteous in Christ, we must still strive to put sin to death, while seeking to conform to the will and universal Law of God. Cooperating with the Holy Spirit, we strive to put to death the remaining deeds of the flesh, replacing our sinful tendencies with what God's Word tells us is good and right. This would involve the "put off/put on" process described in such places as Ephesians 4...etc. And so, we are to pursue righteousness.

2) Godliness: While this would certainly overlap with righteousness in many respects, it generally implies striving to live in such a way that would properly reflect the glory of God and His character. This would include such things as learning to be merciful and gracious and compassionate, and properly displaying the communicable attributes, which God has crafted in us, in designing us in His own image. And obviously, we find this pattern most perfected in the humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ. To pursue Godliness, therefore, is to pursue Christ-likeness. It is to learn to love others, as He has loved us. It is to live sacrificially, striving to give ourselves wholly to God first, which would in turn, lead to giving ourselves to others. [Love your enemies, for even God causes His rain to fall on the just as well as the unjust...etc]

3) Faith: Our faith in God, and in Christ, is more precious than silver and gold, which perish. By faith; by our ultimate confidence in God, at all times, we bring God glory. And our faith is something that must be nurtured, maintained, strengthened and increased. We never

obtain a perfect faith in this life. Indeed, a mustard seed of faith is sufficient to lead to salvation and to accomplish great things, but throughout the process of our Christian walk, we are called to grow our faith in various ways, and especially, through trials and tribulations, where it is greatly tested unto further growth and improvement. To be sure, God's power works in us through faith, and so, the greater our faith, the more effective we will be, for the service of God's kingdom.

4) Love: Love involves, at least, two major realities, with the first actually bringing about the other. And so, the first, is love toward God. While God's love is perfect toward us, ours is most certainly not perfect toward Him. And so, our love for God is greatly improved as we continually ponder and revel in His perfect love toward us, both by virtue of Him creating us, and especially by virtue of His redeeming us in Christ. And furthermore, as we meditate upon all of the glorious perfections of God's being and character, He becomes more lovely to us. And this then leads us to exercise love toward others.

As we draw from the love of God for us, it inevitably drives us to love others, and especially the brethren. And we love others in very tangible ways, by searching out the physical and spiritual needs of others, and striving to meet those needs, in so far as we are fitted, suited and able to do so. And more often than not, such love does not come without sacrifice, discomfort and inconvenience. But, the incomprehensible, sacrificial, agonizing, infinitely inconvenient love of Christ for us, revealed in His incarnation, righteous living and shameful death, provides us with every bit of motivation and power to love others in a like fashion.

5) Patience: While patience would certainly involve our treatment of one another, in the light of our remaining sins and offenses, here Paul also emphasizes our patience and faithfulness through difficult trials and tribulations. This involves the ever growing improvement in our striving to learn to "wait upon God," in the face of trials and sufferings. It also involves maintaining our focus on loving and serving God and others, at all times. The concepts of perseverance, pressing on, endurance and diligence, all find life and breath here. To be sure, some of the greatest growth spurts in the Christian life, come, when remaining active and faithful, in spite of difficult trials and opposition.

6) And finally, Gentleness: Gentleness involves a consistent attitude and demeanor of dealing with others tenderly, kindly and graciously, even when being opposed and having your

buttons pushed. To be sure, gentleness is a growing virtue, where one must learn to endure all manner of attacks, without responding in kind. And so, this is a general demeanor, for which we strive, so as to manifest Christ-likeness, remembering the big picture of man's greatest needs and God's greater glory.

Again, this is a short list of general virtues, which Paul commands Timothy to invest his heart and time in pursuing, while fleeing from the enrapturing pursuit of money and material wealth.

Moving on then, into verse 12, Paul continues, "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."

This exhortation is both revealing and profound, sobering and encouraging. It is revealing because it helps define an essential part of the battle that we face as Christians. In this context, clearly, "fighting the good fight" involves fleeing the strong tug and draw of wealth, and pursuing the virtues herein described. It is profound because this "fleeing" and "pursuing" is described as a "fight." It assumes opposition and deep spiritual conflict. In other words, the "fleeing" and "pursuing" here described, must be consciously recognized as something that will not come easy. There are very real, living enemies that will strive to oppose us in this task, and we must be conscious of this reality. If we are not, either we will get taken off guard and fall away, or, we will grow weary and discouraged when we feel the wave of difficulty that comes with striving after these virtues. We ought to expect opposition and resistance, from both within and without. The outer world and the inner flesh and the outer devil, are all against us in this fight. It is a battle! It will not come easy. And we need a constant reminder of the grace of Christ, and we need a constant dose of the power of Christ, and we need a continual experience of fellowship with Christ and His people, if we are to succeed in this endeavor. If you want to be holy, you must and will have to fight for it, brethren! This reality; this recognition of the real battle that we face in this endeavor, is also sobering, is it not?

And finally, there is also encouragement here, as well. In such a difficult battle we must be able to lay hold of something, that can drive us onward; something that can keep us pressing on, no matter what we face along the way! And that something is "eternal life." Read again,

Paul states, "lay hold on eternal life." Let the promise of the future blessing of glory; that future blessing of being forever in the presence of God and His Son, Jesus Christ, among the redeemed and sanctified people of God; forever...with no more tears, or sorrow, or death, or pain, or suffering, or opposition of any kind (demonic or physical)...let that drive you onward. And it is toward this eternal blessing, that, like Timothy, we have been called. The voice of Christ has called us (His sheep) out of darkness and into His marvelous light, sending us on this journey, which although very difficult, leads to certain glory! And like Timothy, we have "confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses."

The evidence of our confidence in, and our lack of shame toward, Jesus Christ, has been confessed by our words and by our examples, to those who surround us, both in and outside of the church. We have a testimony, affirming our calling and our position in Christ, and this testimony avows that we are on the path of life, which will most certainly bring us to glory! And so, yes, it is a fight, but it is only a fight, to get to, that which Christ has called us unto, and which He will bring to completion, in accordance with His sovereign will, planned before time, and secured in time, by His incarnation, life, death, and resurrection. In other words, "He who began a good work in us, will complete it, until the Day of Christ Jesus!"

And so, Paul charges Timothy to flee, to pursue, to fight, to lay hold of, in keeping with the calling of Christ upon his life, which has already been validated by his witnessed confession.

## **II. Closing Thoughts and Applications**

Brethren, let us now conclude our time by considering three very relevant Applications that we can and ought to take from this charge:

1) Recognize, Brethren, that you cannot possibly pursue both material desires and godly virtues. Sadly, many attempt to do both; indeed, false teachers teach that you ought to pursue both, claiming that it is God's desire for you to do so, but very clearly, here we find that you must flee the one, if you are to pursue the other. Like Jacob's wives, where he could not possibly love both Leah and Rachel at the same time; and as Jesus has said, about not being able to love God and mammon (wealth), Paul makes it very clear here, that we cannot possibly pursue the interests of the world and God's interests at the same time. And yet, we are always pursuing one

or the other. And so, the question really is this, "If you were to take an honest inventory of your life over the last several months or years; if we could somehow call up your life on a video here this morning, what would the evidence show? Would it show that your desires are bound to storing up worldly riches, or the pursuit of godly virtues? Jesus says, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." What does your treasure reveal about your heart?

2) Recognize the conscious, proactive way, in which, we must strive to give heed to Paul's exhortation here. The whole concept of "fleeing" here, implies conscious focus and effort in constantly wresting our hearts away from the tug of the world. In other words, this is not a "sit back or sit down" exercise. We must continually look out for the ways, in which, the world will appeal to, and chase after, and tug at our hearts, and we must flee from those temptations. Like Joseph, Potiphar's wife is constantly after us, and we must not dilly dally around her. We must recognize our natural, fallen propensity toward idolatry, and we must flee from it.

And likewise, we must consciously, actively, pursue godly virtues. They will not just fall down upon us. We must strive after them. These pursuits will not come easy. It is so much easier to just go with the flow of the flesh. No effort is needed to fulfill covetous desires. They are weeds that will just grow no matter what. No cultivation, watering, planting or seeding is required. But, not so with godly virtues. They must be pursued and mined out of the deep caves of the various means of grace. We must fight against stony barriers, competing forces, and inclement stormy moods, to lay hold of them.

3) Consider some of the means of grace, to which, we must constantly avail ourselves, if we are to dig up and increase our wealth of godly virtue. We must be daily in the Word. The Word of God is the ultimate gold and gem mine, where every means of growth in righteousness, faith, love, patience...etc, will come from. But, we cannot do this alone. The precious jewels are imbedded in spiritually discerned truth. And so, without the aid and help of the Holy Spirit, the pages of Scripture are nothing more than paper and ink blotches. And how do we obtain the aid of the Holy Spirit. By prayer...continual prayer. "How much more will your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask?"

And we must strive to lay hold of every means of grace; fellowship with the brethren, exercising and using our spiritual gifts, taking the Lord's Supper together, honoring the whole of

the Lord's Day...all means of edification and growth in grace, which lead us to turn difficult trials into precious opportunities for increasing our faith and improving upon our godly virtues. Again, we can only benefit from these, when we seek them out as priorities. And we can only see their true value; and we can only invest in pursuing them, when we flee the love of money and material gain. In short, we must embrace and cultivate a biblical worldview, striving to recognize the Lordship of Christ over every area of our lives!

[The Gospel...unbelievers are owned by the lusts and desires of the flesh and are heading for certain destruction]

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25