

# **Living in God's Church Today**

**Fight the Good Fight of the Faith**

*1 Timothy 6:11-16*

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# Fight the Good Fight of the Faith

## Scripture

In the last chapter of his First Letter to Timothy, Paul issued four charges to Timothy: first, about the false teachers (6:3-10), second, to Christian leaders (6:11-16), third, to rich Christians (6:17-19), and finally, to Timothy himself (6:20-21).

Let us read our text for today in 1 Timothy 6:11-16:

**<sup>11</sup> But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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, <sup>14</sup> to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>15</sup> which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, <sup>16</sup> 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. (1 Timothy 6:11-16)**

## Introduction

Our *Book of Church Order* has a form of service for when a man is ordained as an officer in the Presbyterian Church in America. A Presbytery ordains a man to the office of Teaching Elder and a Session ordains a man to the office of Ruling Elder

or Deacon. A sermon is preached that is suitable to the occasion, vows are taken by various parties, and charges are delivered to the officer and to the body that is calling the man to serve as an officer. One of the charges is given to the ordinand. The charge reminds the ordinand of the conduct that is proper to him and his office. Ordination is the setting apart of a man by God to serve God and his people.

It seems to me that Paul was thinking of Timothy's ordination service when he started writing the words to which we come in our text today. Perhaps Paul was restating the charge that he had given to Timothy on the day of Timothy's ordination. Paul set down several characteristics that mark a Christian leader and now as he brought his letter to a close, Paul reminded Timothy of what he had said to him on that occasion.

It is helpful to keep in mind the context of this section of Paul's letter. Paul had just warned Timothy about the problem with false teachers. As we come to today's text, Paul is urging Timothy to live differently than the false teachers.

While it is true that Paul's writing is directly aimed at Timothy, and therefore also at Christian leaders, the characteristics Paul lists should mark every Christian. And so, in that sense, these characteristics apply to every one of us.

## Lesson

1 Timothy 6:11-16 shows us five characteristics that mark a Christian leader.

Let's use the following outline:

1. A Christian Leader Knows What He Flees From  
(6:11a)
2. A Christian Leader Knows What He Follows After  
(6:11b)

3. A Christian Leader Knows What He Fights For (6:12a)
4. A Christian Leader Knows What He Fastens Onto (6:12b)
5. A Christian Leader Knows What He Is Faithful To (6:13-16)

## I. A Christian Leader Knows What He Flees From (6:11a)

First, a Christian leader knows what he flees from.

Paul began verse 11 with these words to Timothy, **“But as for you, O man of God.”** I am sure that when Timothy read these words, he stopped abruptly. He did a double-take. Did he read that correctly? Who was Paul referring to as a **“man of God”**? Surely not Timothy? But, as he read and re-read those words it became blindingly clear that Paul *was* calling Timothy a **“man of God.”** So, why would this cause Timothy to stop reading abruptly?

First, although Timothy did not know it at the time, he is the only person in the New Testament that is ever called a **“man of God.”** In his Second Letter to Timothy, Paul did refer to every pastor as a **“man of God.”** But at the time of Paul’s writing of this letter, no one was called a **“man of God.”**

And second, the reason this title caught Timothy’s attention is because it was used in the Old Testament. It was originally used of Moses (Deuteronomy 33:1; Joshua 14:6), the great leader of God’s ancient people. Then it was used of the great prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 9:6). So, Timothy would have shrank from being on the same level as such exalted company.

However, eventually the title **“man of God”** came to be used as technical term to refer to a man who spoke officially

for God. It was used about 70 times in the Old Testament and it was often used to refer to the prophets who spoke for God.

It seems then that Paul was intentionally trying to get Timothy's attention. He took a title that was used of a man who spoke for God and applied it to Timothy. "Timothy," Paul was saying, "you are to speak for God. You are a man of God." Therefore, this indicates that this letter was primarily directed to Timothy, exhorting him to be faithful to God in spite of the opposition and difficulty he faced as a leader of God's people.

And it is in this sense that every pastor and elder is also a **"man of God."** He is God's spokesman who tells God's people what God has said in his word.

The first characteristic that was to mark a Christian leader is what he flees from. This is how Paul put it in verse 11a, **"But as for you, O man of God, flee these things."** What **"things"** was Timothy to flee from? Timothy was to flee from the things that Paul had mentioned in the previous section (in verses 3-10). Timothy was to flee from the things that deviate from the truth (6:3-4a), divide the church (6:4b-5a), and desire financial gain from their false teaching (6:5b-10).

Commentator Phil Ryken tells the following story regarding the command to **"flee these things."** He writes:

The command to "flee these things" reminds me of an incident that took place on the campus of Wheaton College in the 1980s. A popular prank in those days was (and probably still is) to use surgical tubing to launch water balloons at students going in and out of the freshman dorm. One night, as unsuspecting freshmen were being bombarded from long-distance, two cars suddenly drove up and the pranksters were surrounded by public safety officers. One of the officers smirked at the unexpected success of their sting operation.

“What do you guys think you’re doing?” he said.

“Running!” answered one of the students, and before public safety could do anything about it, he ran into the bushes and disappeared. The point is that you have to know when to run.<sup>1</sup>

When it comes to anything that will cause a Christian leader to fall into sin, he must **“flee these things.”**

## II. A Christian Leader Knows What He Follows After (6:11b)

Second, a Christian leader knows what he follows after.

Paul wrote in verse 11b, **“Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.”** These virtues seem to be listed in pairs.

Paul wanted Timothy to pursue **“righteousness”** and **“godliness.”** It seems that **“righteousness”** refers to justice and fair dealing with people. And **“godliness”** is used in the sense that Timothy must pursue God and not money (as the false teachers were doing).

Then Timothy was to pursue **“faith”** and **“love.”** This is a familiar couplet in Paul’s letters. **“Faith”** in this context is perhaps referring to integrity and faithfulness in his dealings with people. And **“love”** is referring to sacrifice and service to others in which there is no room for greed.

Finally, Timothy was to pursue **“steadfastness”** and **“gentleness.”** The idea behind **“steadfastness”** is endurance, which is patience in difficult circumstances. And **“gentleness”**

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Daniel M. Doriani, and Philip Graham Ryken, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 266–267.

is referring to patience with difficult people.

While these characteristics are to be true of all Christians, they are to be particularly true of Christian ministers. A minister must **“pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.”** They must be his lifelong commitment. He must pursue all of these things. He cannot say that he will pursue five of the six. No, he must pursue all of them.

### III. A Christian Leader Knows What He Fights For (6:12a)

Third, a Christian leader knows what he fights for.

Paul wrote in verse 12a, **“Fight the good fight of the faith.”** The Greek word for **“fight”** (*agonizomai*) can also be translated into English as “agonize.” It was used in the military and athletics to describe the concentration, discipline, and extreme effort needed to win. The expression **“the faith”** refers to the content of biblical truth. Paul wanted Timothy to exert himself in contending for biblical truth. False teachers were leading people astray. They were pointing people to a false gospel, that in reality was no gospel at all. Timothy was to stand for the truth and proclaim it with all his power.

Every generation must contend for the truth. Doctrinal errors creep into every generation. Satan never sleeps. He is always seeing seeds of error and dissension. And Christian leaders must stand for the truth, they must **“fight the good fight of the faith.”**

That is why I was so glad that our church had a full complement of commissioners at the past two General Assemblies of our denomination. We have been witnessing a growing progressive theology creep into our denomination in the past few

years. The arena in which to deal with such matters is in the courts of our denomination. So, it was encouraging to see your leaders fighting the good fight of the faith at this year's General Assembly.

#### **IV. A Christian Leader Knows What He Fastens Onto (6:12b)**

Fourth, a Christian leader knows what he fastens onto.

Paul wrote in verse 12b, **“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.”** Paul was not referring to salvation here in this verse. Timothy was already a believer. He had been baptized and had made **“the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.”** Later, he had been ordained to pastoral ministry and once again had made **“the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.”** No, Paul wanted Timothy to **“take hold”** or to “get a grip” on the issues relating to eternal life so that he would live and minister with a heavenly perspective.

Dr. Robert Coleman was one of my professors at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He used to say, “Don't be so heavenly-minded that you are of no earthly use.” I don't believe that the saying was original to him, but I first heard it from him. One thing I appreciated about Dr. Coleman was that he seemed so in touch with his Lord. He seemed distracted when he walked about on campus but I believe that is because he was communing with Jesus. His prayers were so fervent that it seemed that he was conversing with Jesus standing right next to him. He was a wonderful example of someone who had a deep relationship with Jesus and yet was also passionate about standing for the truth and making Jesus known to others.



## V. **A Christian Leader Knows What He Is Faithful To (6:13-16)**

And fifth, a Christian leader knows what he is faithful to. There are three things a Christian leader is faithful to.

### *A. A Christian Leader Is Faithful to Witnesses (6:13)*

First, a Christian leader is faithful to witnesses.

Paul wrote in verse 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.”** Paul called the Father and the Son to serve, as it were, as witnesses to the charge that Paul gave to Timothy. Paul affirmed that the Father was the creator and sustainer of all things. And concerning Jesus, Paul said that he made **“the good confession.”** Even though Jesus knew that confessing himself to be the true King and Messiah would cost him his life, he still went ahead and made that confession. Jesus did not avoid the imminent danger. He trusted that his Heavenly Father would ultimately take care of him.

A Christian leader must keenly aware that the Father and the Son (and the Holy Spirit) are serving as witnesses to his ministry. Therefore, he must be faithful to those witnesses.

### *B. A Christian Leader Is Faithful to Obey (6:14-15a)*

Second, a Christian leader is faithful to obey.

Paul gave the command to Timothy in verses 14-15a, **“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.”** The **commandment** that Timothy was to keep was the entire word of God. Paul charged Timothy to preach the word (2 Timothy 4:2). He also repeatedly told Timothy to guard the word of God (1:18, 19; 4:6, 16; 6:20; 2 Timothy 1:13, 14; 2:15-18). And Timothy was to do so until **the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ**. Timothy was to obey his charge faithfully until Jesus' return.

When a man is ordained to the office of Teaching Elder, he is charged to fulfill the duties of his office. He is a shepherd of the flock but his primary responsibility is the ministry of the word and sacrament. He is to preach the word of God clearly, boldly, and accurately. He is not to succumb to the pressure of cultural norms. Like a prophet of old, he must proclaim the truth of God. Or, to put it another way, he must point people to Jesus. He must tell them of the joys that are to be found in a right relationship with him and he must also warn them of the horrors of rejecting Jesus. He must be faithful to obey.

*C. A Christian Leader Is Faithful to Worship (6:15b-16)*

And third, a Christian leader is faithful to worship.

Having mentioned the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ in verses 14b-15a, Paul went on to write an astonishing description of Jesus in verses 15b-16, **“he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 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.”** Paul often broke into doxology and worship and praise. And he did so here again. He wanted Timothy to be faithful in his worship of the one who had called him to salvation and into service.

One of the courses at seminary was eschatology—the

study of the last things. Individual eschatology covered the topics of physical death, the immortality of the soul, and the location of the body and the soul until the return of Jesus. General eschatology covered the topics of the second coming of Christ, the millennium, the resurrection of the dead, and heaven and hell. Most students looked forward to this opportunity to study something about which they knew so little and to be guided by a trained theologian. One of the facts that struck me was how the return of Jesus motivated believers to obedience. The return of Jesus is just as certain as his resurrection. And we live and serve and worship in light of the imminent return of Jesus.

### **Conclusion**

Therefore, having analyzed the proper conduct of a Christian leader in 1 Timothy 6:11-16, let us pray that God will give us leaders who model these characteristics in their lives.

Last year our Presbytery disciplined one of our ministers. He had confessed to sin and then would not cooperate with the Presbytery regarding further investigations about his life and ministry. During one of my discussions with him, he argued that because his church was so large and that so many people had come to faith in Jesus under his ministry, he should receive a light censure.

The point is that a Christian leader models all of these characteristics in his life. He cannot fail in any one area. He must model proper conduct in every area of his life.

May God give us leaders who model all these characteristics in their lives. Amen.

# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church  
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can  
be found at:

1. <https://tampabaypresbyterian.org/SermonAudio>.
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp).
3. [www.sermonaudio.com/source\\_detail.asp?sourceid=FreddyFritz](http://www.sermonaudio.com/source_detail.asp?sourceid=FreddyFritz).

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