

Greed and its Destruction

1 Timothy 6:2-14

Reggie Sanchez, Gospel Community Church, 11/05/2017

Text: 1 Timothy 6:2-14

2 Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brothers; rather they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their good service are believers and beloved. Teach and urge these things. 3 If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound[a] words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, 4 he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, 5 and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. 6 But godliness with contentment is great gain, 7 for we brought nothing into the world, and[b] we cannot take anything out of the world. 8 But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. 9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. 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[c] Pontius Pilate made the good confession, 14 to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ...

I. Introduction:

1. Promises

Many things in life make us promises, and what we believe in our hearts about promises drives so much of our actions. If we believe God's promises, our lives will reflect that belief in many wonderful ways. If we believe the promises of sin, which lie to us and claim that we will find life and joy apart from God, apart from God's will, and apart from God's ways, then our lives will reflect our trust in those promises as well and will reap destruction. Whether it is from friends, God's Word, politicians, the TV, or any other voice in our lives, promises are constantly being made to us about all sorts of things.

Perhaps one of the most powerful voices of promise in our lives is the voice of money, that makes many promises to us. Money often promises happiness, significance, status, power, peace, security, and great joy. Money is something that God has ordained be part of our lives. It is something that we need, and it is not evil in and of itself. With money we can use it to bring great glory to God, to fund wonderful Kingdom endeavors, and we can use it to help other people. God has made promises to us about using money for his Kingdom, and they are all promises of wonderful blessings. There is a right way to use money, and next week we will spend a lot more time examining that. This week our text causes us to consider the wrong use of money. Just as money can be used for good and to bring glory to God, so also, money can be used to greatly dishonor God, and the sinful craving of money, also known as greed, can be something that we use to sin against other people with.

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Whatever the promises are that we believe about money, those promises will drive our actions in relation to money. All uses of money happens and plays out before our great God, nothing escapes his view, and tonight we will be in 1 Timothy 6:2-14 and will follow Paul's teaching on the evil that can come through greed. This text emphasizes the misuse of money. Next week we will cover verses 15-21 which will deal with the proper use of money. So if at the end of this sermon you find yourself thinking that there is more to be said on the topic of money, you are right. There is more, and we will consider it next week. But unless you want a 2 hour sermon today, we will have to break this message up into two parts.

II. The Motive and Fruit of Many False Teachers vs. the Godly vs. 2-10

1. Doctrinal foundation of a faithful minister

Let's begin in the last phrase of verse two where Paul tells Timothy, "Teach and urge these things." What things are Timothy to teach and urge? In context Paul just finished giving instructions on how slaves and masters are to relate to each other. Paul at least has those things in mind, but I think he has the entire letter in mind as well. In 3:15 Paul said he was writing this entire letter to instruct Timothy on how to conduct things in the household of faith, which is God's church. Timothy is not to just present the doctrine and church practices that flow from sound doctrine as good ideas that the church should consider. Rather, with his God-given authority he is to teach these things to the church and urge them to be believed, followed, and obeyed. This is a demonstration of Timothy's humility because in leading with God's Word he is not elevating himself above God's revelation, but rather, is faithfully delivering it just as God has given it to him. As Paul told Timothy in 4:6 any minister who faithfully puts the Word of God before the saints will be a good minister of Christ Jesus.

2. The False Teacher first Rejects God's Word

There is another type of teacher though and Paul begins to deal with him starting in verse 3 (read vs. 3-4a). A man who teaches unbiblical doctrine, who rejects the purity of God's Word, who twists and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. Notice what is in this text as it pertains to the Word and the goal of the Word. We see that doctrine that contradicts Apostolic teaching, that does not agree with the sounds words of Christ, is also doctrine that is at war with teaching that will lead to godliness. Another way of saying this is false doctrine always leads to sin, whereas faithful doctrine is unto holiness. False teaching is rarely, if ever, about the false idea itself, instead, driving the false teaching is a love of sin that must construct false teaching in order to justify indulging the sin. That is why false teachers lead lives that are rank with sin, and the first sin noted about them is that they are arrogant. They change God's Word, they think their words are better than the Lord's so whether it is by outright rejecting Scripture, suppressing certain truths by ignoring them, or twisting the Scripture and trying to convince others that God's Word says something that it doesn't say, false teachers, in their arrogance, exalt their own teaching and doctrine above God's. That is the highest expression of pride.

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This man is “puffed up with conceit,” and the irony about it is that though he fancies himself to be the man, the truth is, “he understands nothing.” He thinks he is the wisest man in the room, but really he is the most foolish. There is an irony to pride. When we are proud we think we are much greater than we actually are, and we become completely useless for any true Kingdom good, while we deceive ourselves that we are exalted.

3. The Sin of false teachers

When an arrogant man who has no understanding begins to operate, in his delusions, he can't help but flaunt his ignorance and put it on display for all to see! Notice the next statement in verse 4 is, “He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words...” He longs for quarrels, he longs for controversy, he lives to start arguments, and I believe the reason that he does so is because he is puffed up with conceit and in the controversy and arguments he starts, he is trying to display to his hearers his own greatness, and his own perceived brilliance, and insights! He loves to quarrel about words the text says. I take this to mean that he likes to take his own ideas and thoughts and fight people so that they see how remarkable is his intellect and privileged knowledge.

This is not the godly man who will courageously contend for the sound doctrine of the Apostles, or the faithful teachings of Christ, or the instruction from God's Word that accords with godliness, which is a good thing. Rather, this is a man who is spreading false teaching in his arrogance, and he loves to start quarrels with it. There is no true reasoning with this man, he is self-deceived, he cannot hear the truth, and he only wants to fight.

Look at the fruit it bears in our text which tells us that his quarrels, “...produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth...” All of his followers and disciples are envious of each other, they are always fighting, they slander and lie about each other, they are full of evil suspicions thinking everyone is out to get them. A huge part of the reason they harbor evil suspicions towards each other is because they themselves are full of sin and they think other people are like them. To be with these people is to be among a people who has constant friction our text says. This is the fruit of false teaching. The disciples are like their arrogant and contentious teachers in that they destroy each other. Like their teachers who understand nothing, Paul describes the followers as, “Depraved in mind and deprived of the truth...” Their minds are darkened, corrupt, they lack all truth, and everything they see is distorted, perverted, and wrong as they process all of life through an unbiblical lens that leads them deeper and deeper into sin and worldliness.

4. They do it for the money vs. 5

As Paul continues his description of the false teachers and their followers, he gives one of the chief characteristics of these men at the end of verse 5 by saying that in and through all of their depravity, false doctrine, craving of useless quarrels, and profound arrogance, is this one deep and corrupt motivation, namely, that they are, “...imagining that godliness is a means of gain.” Now Paul is not speaking of genuine godliness here because he just said in verse 3 that all of their teaching and way of life is something that does not accord with godliness. Rather, it is their false godliness that he speaks to here. Through their false teaching, through their twisting and denying of God's Word in their arrogance, and in their craving of controversy they create a façade of godliness. They posture and pretend to be serving God when

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really they are just serving themselves. But through this false godliness, they are portraying themselves as godly people for the purpose of using this so-called godliness as a means of gain.

The idea here is financial gain. Greed is what drives these men. Unfortunately, in Timothy's day and certainly in ours, when arrogant men pervert the truth with their teaching, when they live in contentious sin, when their teaching doesn't demand godliness according to the sound doctrine of the Gospel, and when they put on a front that they are holy, that package of evil, with all of its falsehood, is actually something that makes money! Corrupt and sinful men will pay talented liars stockpiles of cash to tell them that they do not need the Gospel, that their sin is okay with God, that they can walk in arrogance and pride unscathed, and that there will not be a final day of reckoning for their wickedness. There is big bucks in false teaching! Whether you are telling your followers that every day is a Friday and getting rich off of it by making people feel comfortable in their sin, or whether you are perverting the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and constantly stirring up controversies and quarrels that your arrogance craves, you can sell a lot of books, videos, and raise a lot of money by marketing heresy in a godless pursuit of greed! People will pay lots of money to have their pride massaged or to have their wounded consciences appeased without having to actually come to the cross and repent of their sins. False teachers financially capitalize on this, they are driven by their greed, and they use their false godliness as a means to get rich and it is something which God condemns.

5. Faithful Teachers are Content vs. 6-8

Paul characterizes the faithful ministers in a very different manner (read vs. 6-8). Those who truly love God, his Word, his glory and his kingdom are content with God alone and merely seek the meeting of their basic needs. They have no ambitions to be rich, they have no lust for great financial gain. Instead, they realize that they came into this world with nothing and they will leave with nothing. All of our earthly possessions are going to burn one day. It is foolish for us to spend ourselves in the pursuit of something that will not last beyond this life, when we can invest in things that will last for eternity. It does absolutely no good for a man to gain the entire world in this life, yet forfeit his soul for eternity (Mt. 16:26). All that a man truly needs in this life from a possessions standpoint is the meeting of his basic needs.

True godliness is content. Paul says godliness with contentment is great gain. How is such a thing great gain? In our discontentment we strive and strive to fill that discontentment with stuff, hoping that once we have finally accumulated a great gain of material wealth, then we will be content, then we will have joy and lasting peace and happiness. But our hearts and souls were not made to find our deepest joys and pleasures in stuff, they were made to find their deepest joys and pleasures in God. Therefore, anything less than God that we pursue to fill our emptiness will never suffice. You will never have enough homes, cars, gold, jewelry, clothes, possessions, or a big enough bank account to satisfy the appetite for God that the Lord made you with. Even if you have all of this, you will still hunger for more because you were made to be filled with God, and every material possession in the universe falls short of God, which is why so many rich people are so miserable and discontent.

But to have genuine godliness with contentment is great gain, because if you are in a relationship with God through the Gospel of Jesus Christ that results in a godly life and gives you contentment, you have gained something of infinite value! Contentment is one of the most elusive things in the world, and it is only those who have come to know, enjoy,

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worship, and commune with the living God himself who know this contentment! You cannot pursue contentment in the world, in wealth, in achievements, in your own righteousness, in sin, or in anything else, and pursue contentment in God at the same time. It is one or the other. When someone truly tastes and sees that the Lord is good, nothing else will ever truly satisfy his soul.

In Matthew 13:44 Jesus said, (read). The Kingdom of God is so valuable that for this man in the parable, if it costs him everything, with joy he will sell all he has to gain it. This doesn't mean you can buy your way into heaven, instead, what it means is that when you truly come to realize the value, and beauty and richness of knowing God, if it costs you everything you have to follow him, you realize that he is so wonderful that you can lose everything with joy if it means gaining Jesus! This is the exact opposite heart of the Rich Young Ruler who when Jesus told him to sell all he had and follow Jesus, the Rich Young Ruler refused and went away sad. He was a blind fool. He did not know true treasure when it looked him right in the face and in his blindness he clung to the worthless things of this world, which by now have perished and decayed rather than have Christ himself.

But the man of God who walks in godly contentment, he has "great gain," because he has so come to gain an intimacy with God himself, that his heart is free from the corruption of covetousness and greed. He knows the Lord is more precious than silver and he is completely unfazed by not having the treasures of this world if only he can enjoy Christ more.

That is exactly the logic of Hebrews 13:5 which says, "Keep your life free from the love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'" The reason we are to be diligent to keep the love of money out of our lives, the reason why we are to be content with what we have, is because Jesus himself has promised that he will never leave us or forsake us. Do you see what the author of Hebrews is getting at? Contentment with what you have, and freedom from the love of money comes from knowing Christ will never leave you. He is a permanent possession of his people. Indeed that is one of the New Covenant promises wherein God himself declares, "I will be their God and they will be my people." God is the God of his people! Yes we belong to him and were bought with a price, but at the same time, he belongs to us and gave himself to us.

How valuable is God? What amount of possessions could compare to his worth? I believe Hebrews 13:5 is trying to get us to see is that if we have God himself, a possession of infinite value, what can you possibly add to that? There's nothing greater than God, you don't need stuff, you don't need possessions, you have God, so be content with that, not only be content, but rejoice with all of your might because God is yours and you are his. To live a godly life with this contentment is great gain because it means that you have gained God himself in such a way that your heart is not enslaved to the love of money! How priceless is that? Godliness, rather than being something you use to gain money, is something that you pursue to enjoy more of God with. Timothy, unlike the false teachers, is to be such a man. When a man desires God above all things, it will play out beautifully in his life. When a man desires to use religious things to get rich, it will play out in his life with the tremendous destruction described in verses 9-10.

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6. The Perils of the Money Lover vs. 9-10

Let's begin breaking down these verses as we listen to what the inspired Word of God says to us about those who want to be rich. Vs. 9, "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation..." The desire for riches, which contrasts sharply with contentment in the Lord, will cause a person to fall into temptation, which means, through their evil desires for sin, they will be overcome and trapped by the temptation to pursue those desires and will thus fall into sin. Paul goes on to further articulate what it is like to fall into temptation by saying those who fall into it also, "...fall into a snare." A snare is a trap set by hunters for animals. The animals walk by and they are caught by the snare, they cannot escape the snare, and the hunter eventually finds them and kills them. Such is the fate of those who desire riches and fall into temptation. This desire for riches is not necessarily a desire to be a billionaire. It can be, inordinate desires for a bigger house, a nicer car, a large bank account, or a great accumulation of other treasures. I think gauging whether or not you are falling into this desire is to test your contentment. What if you never have those things? Will you still rejoice in God with all of your heart? Could you genuinely utter an amen from your heart to Habakkuk 3:17-18 (read). If the answer is no, you are falling into this temptation. You can also gauge this by assessing how far you are willing to go to gain the treasures you covet. Some people will sacrifice many godly priorities in their lives so that they can have their precious treasures. They will rearrange their entire lives for a job that makes them rich, the dream house they want, or an ability to buy a nicer car, or a boat, or whatever. They overwork and abandon their families and leave their children neglected so that they can fund their indulgent lifestyle. They are not content with the Lord, and they are servants of money.

If you think measuring your heart's desires and contentment in relation to money is not biblical then I would direct you to the last statement of verse 9 which after saying those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, also says that they fall, "...into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction." They fall into desires for money the statement says. They are not just any kind of desires, they are senseless and they are harmful. That is the insanity of greed. The desire for it is absolutely senseless. There is no need for it and the pursuit of greed and all you must do and sacrifice to indulge your flesh, is irrational! Not only do these desires make no sense, but also the text says these desires are harmful and they will plunge you into ruin and destruction. That is not a game. This is a promise from God. You will not see this promise paraded around in America, certainly not in Christmas cards, or God's promise book for you, or your best life now. But it is a promise. If you fall into the snare of desiring to be rich, these desires are senseless, harmful, and they will destroy your soul. It is a craving for death. Another way of saying that is the love of money can send you to hell, that's what ruin and destruction is in its highest expression.

Many people who are living this way are willfully oblivious to it. They still believe in Jesus, they still go to church, and they still read their Bibles. But God is not deceived by religious hypocrisy. Greedy people shift their center. What starts to fill their hearts and minds is fantasies about money, possessions, and more worldly gain. It comes forth in their speech where financial wisdom and money management becomes what you hear from them over and over again. Their giving goes down and though once very generous, they now try to find the least that they can give and get away with it in God's eyes. They once were cheerful givers, but now they begrudge giving to God and no longer sacrificially give in the name of being wise stewards of their financial situation hoping for the future day when they will give generously again. Subtly, they have made their financial goals and dreams the center of their life and they have pinned God onto that dream and hope that he will help them achieve their financial desires! They are deceived, they are heading towards

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destruction, and they get very angry when you tap on their precious idol of wealth. If you find these things rising up in your soul, don't play with it, harbor it, or justify it. You need to repent from it and seek God and beg him to make himself, his glory, and his splendor the absolute treasure of your heart that you covet and desire above all else! If you do not, verse 10 will play itself out in your life.

7. Money the root of shipwrecking evils vs. 10

Read vs. 10 What a powerful statement! Two things stand out here and we will deal with them one by one. First, the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. Isn't that so true. Think about what sin people commit in pursuit of money. Business owners do not pay their employees a fair wage because if they did they couldn't indulge their greed. Employees will steal and rob their employers because they are not content with their wages due to their love of money. People will become liars and refuse to pay the bills and debts that they owe because their hearts are in love with acquiring riches. Women will sin against God and become prostitutes, and even accept the business of married men and have a part in ruining their souls and destroying families because of their love of money. People will sell drugs to other human beings and get them addicted and make them slaves as they poison them and ruin their lives in the pursuit of money. I saw a documentary about a place in Mexico under the dark reign of a brutal cartel who kidnaps kids and then harvests their organs because they can make a lot of money off of it on the black market. Many wars are fought and people enslaved as countries pursue acquiring more land, more power, and more wealth with their actions fueled by greed. Many fathers will not see their children because they work 70 hours per week in pursuit of funding their new fishing boat because of their greed. Robberies, home invasions, car thefts, human trafficking, slavery, and every vile thing under the sun takes place on this planet every single day as wicked people pursue their love of money, which is the root cause of so much sin.

If you have a love affair with money, you will fall into terrible sin. You want to examine sin in your life and defeat it? It is important that you understand the root cause of your sin. Test yourselves and see how much your preoccupation with money is driving your sinful fears, anger, bitterness, or anything else. Jesus said in Matthew 13:22 that the love of money can choke the Word in your heart. If the Word has been dull to you lately, perhaps it is because your love of money is choking it. If the nourishing Word is being starved by a love of money, it is only a matter of time before you fall into great sin. Is the love of money bearing evil fruit in your life? I want you to wrestle with this because the 2nd thing that stands out in this verse is something I don't want to happen to any of us.

"It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs." Wow! Do you hear that? The love of money has caused some people to wander from the faith. It makes sense to me because we have a homeless, penniless, persecuted, and crucified savior and he said a servant is not above his master. God may take our wealth from us as we follow him. God may not cause us to ever get that house we desire if we are walking down the path he has for us. God may call us to a life of financial struggle and hardship in the path of living out our salvation. Some people, even though the treasure you have with you in a life of financial difficulty is God himself, they refuse to follow God down these paths. They get sick of the financial difficulties, they get sick of the cost of following Jesus, they get sick of helping others, they get sick of giving, and they eventually get sick of this entire thing called biblical Christianity and they leave the faith entirely or they exchange it for a watered down, demonic, and

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powerless version of Christianity that pins Jesus onto the American dream and they thus wander away from the faith and will be judged in hell after living a life of being pierced with many pangs as the consequences for their money-loving actions.

Lest you think I am being too radical or over the top in addressing this, I want to remind you again, that this is God himself speaking to us in his Word. I am speaking strongly on this because the text speaks strongly on this and I must come under the text and so must you. When I went to Brazil on several mission trips to Sao Paulo, we served in what the locals called a, "favela," which is Portuguese for "ghetto." There we encountered many wonderful people who knew Jesus as their treasures. Some only had tin shacks for homes, there was no electricity, no running water, nevertheless, they knew the Lord and they were the happiest people I have ever met. As soon as I came home, I would show pictures of this neighborhood to many people and after a while I began to become frustrated when I kept hearing Americans say, "O don't you feel so sorry for them? They don't have the things that we have and that is so sad." I know what they meant for the most part, they just had compassion on their poverty, which is a good thing. But what I wanted to say was, "No I don't feel sorry for them! They know Jesus richly in their hearts while they live in poverty and they are ten times happier than any American I've ever met. I feel sorry for us, who are in bondage to our stuff and know not the Christ like these people do!" If we find ourselves being motivated by greed and a desire to hoard wealth, then there is only one thing for us to do, and that is to do verses 11-12.

8. Fight the Good Fight

Verse 11 begins by exhorting Timothy to do the opposite of the false teachers, "But as for you, O man of God, flee these things..." Timothy is to flee the greed, arrogance, false teaching, and the innumerable sins that accompany such a life. Should Timothy see these things rise in him, should he be tempted, should he sin in any way, he is to respond by fleeing sin! Run from it! Do not pet it, coddle it, rename it, justify it, make excuses for it, or in any way make an accommodation for the flesh. We must kill it and flee from it! That is the only proper response to something that wants to snare you, pierce you with many pangs, plunge you into destruction and ruin, and cause you to wander from the faith. As John Owen famously said, "Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you." There is no alternative.

But it is not enough to simply flee sin, we have to pursue something else, otherwise we just aimlessly retreat, but we are not actually going anywhere. Paul tells Timothy to, "Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness." Righteousness and godliness contrast with the sins that characterize the false teachers and their followers. We are to know what God's Word says is righteous and godly and we are to set our face towards holiness and make a concentrated effort to pursue it. The love and gentleness listed in the text contrasts with the contentious spirit of false teachers who crave controversies. We should be peace makers, we should love our brothers and sisters, and while we must correct things when necessary, our desire should be for peace, not quarreling.

Verse 11 tells us we must flee sin and pursue righteousness with "faith," and "steadfastness," as well. There are going to be times when our feelings are lying to us. They are going to tell us that money is better than God. They are going to desire to start needless quarrels rooted in pride, they are going to desire to run counter to God's Word, they are going to desire to be a force of destruction in the body, and when our feelings are doing that, by faith, knowing what God's

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Word says is righteous and godly, we must resist our feelings that can lie to us, and walk forward in faith, trusting in God, pursuing him as our treasure, begging him to renew a right spirit in us. The things we know to be true and right sometimes will be invisible in this life, and we have to have faith in God, to bring about that which we do not see, whether it is a dear loved one's repentance, the deliverance of our own heart from lusting for money, the uplifting of our downcast soul that for some reason is plunged into Sheol with despair, or a root of bitterness we know we should not have, whatever it is, by faith, we must lay hold of God, and ask God to be God in our lives, by accomplishing by his Spirit, what we cannot do on our own, yet know by his Word is the right and true thing.

Fleeing sin and pursuing righteousness not only requires faith, but the verse says it also requires, "steadfastness." To be steadfast is to not give up no matter how it looks. When you are exercising faith you are doing so because there is no sight. Perhaps for a moment you can maintain your faith, but what about when days, weeks, months, and years go by and you still do not see what you long to see in God's Kingdom, in your walk, or in your ministry? When those prolonged seasons of invisibility are unfolding that you can only press through by faith, you must also have steadfastness of faith, a holy and strong tenacity that lays hold of the great theology of the band Journey who said, "Don't stop believing..!" Faith is very difficult sometimes. You will be tested, tried, and it will be hard and discouraging. That's okay. The real Christian life isn't supposed to be easy, it is difficult, it requires faith because so much of the time what your eyes see are not the things that God desires, but you must believe God can and will make all things right in his perfect timing, according to his perfect wisdom, and you must be steadfast while you wait! The alternative is to become impatient, give into sin, and shipwreck your faith. Paul knows this is hard, which is why he wrote verse 12. (Read vs. 12). It is a fight! Sometimes in tough seasons it feels like the spiritual battles will never stop. Sometimes they wear you down and tempt you to quit by convincing you that the battle is not worth it. But one of the encouragements of verse 12 is the truth that the fight is a good fight. Don't lay down, don't spiritually tap out, when you get knocked down get up before you are counted out, the fight is good, and it is worth fighting.

The good news is, it is a fight of faith. The fact that it is a fight of faith means that your faith lays hold of a living God who is able to raise the dead, lift you up, revive your spirits, strengthen you in weakness, and keep you following him. Your fight, is a fight to believe God, to lay hold of his promises, and to ask him to purify your heart and keep himself as the utmost treasure of your soul! In this fight, you choose to flee sin, you choose to pursue righteousness, you groan, you hurt, you cry, you struggle, you can feel discouraged at times, you can have intense battles with the love of money, pride, or temptations to be divisive and quarrelsome, but at the end of the day, you cast your sins on Jesus, you lay hold of him by faith, and you ask him to create in you a clean heart and renew a right spirit within you (Psalm 51).

By faith you ask God to lift you from despair and help you to rely not on yourself, but on God who raises the dead (2 Cor. 1:9) By faith you beg God, in the struggle with the love of money, to incline your heart towards his testimonies and not towards getting gain (Ps. 119:36). You say to him, "O God I cannot get this greed out of my heart. It is filling my thoughts, my heart, and my desires. I am blind to your glory right now. I don't feel your presence, and all I want to do is go shopping to fill my emptiness! But I know James 4:8 says, "Draw near to God and he will draw near to you," so I am trying to draw near by faith, please come to me and deliver me! Father you Word says in 1 John 5:14-15 that if I pray according to your will you will hear me and give me what I ask for. Lord I ask for a pure heart and deliverance from this temptation and that you will open my eyes to the wonder of your glory, that you will let me feel the sanctifying effects of your presence, O God come to me! I stand on the cross of your Son that took away my sins, I come clothed in his

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righteousness before you and I am begging you to have mercy, to wash me, to restore me, to give me strength to keep fighting, and to help me overcome my greed, my bitterness, my deceptive ways, my anger, my depression, my lust, my fears, and my desire for vain glory! Deliver me O God, for you are my God! By faith I lay my soul before you and beg you to lift me from this darkness!" That is one example of how you might fight the good fight of faith with prayer and the Word.

In fighting the good fight of faith, which is always God-reliant, you do the rest of verse 12, namely, you, "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." Timothy's faith began with a good confession of his faith in the Gospel before many witnesses, this likely refers to his baptism. Notice his confession of faith must be something that causes him to permanently fight the good fight if in fact it is genuine faith. Fighting the good fight is an ongoing reality of laying hold of eternal life. I covered this a few weeks ago and will not re-preach it now, but I will remind you that eternal life is secure and cannot be lost by those who truly receive it. But all genuine believers, make war on their sin, they fight the good fight of faith that began at their original confession, and in so doing they lay hold of eternal life. Making a good confession, and then willfully living in justified sin with no battle against it is demonic faith, it will not save you, and you will fall under the wrath of God if you do not repent and stop playing games. Paul clearly lays out to Timothy here that his confession of faith must play out on a battle field of fighting the good fight during his entire lifetime if he is to lay hold of eternal life. Making the good confession, fighting the good fight, and laying hold of eternal life are inseparable. You either have them all or you do not truly have any of them.

If you look at verse 14, you will see that Timothy is to stay in the fight permanently (read vs 14). He is to be faithful, he is to keep the commandment of persevering in the faith of the Gospel unto holiness, unstained and without reproach. I don't believe that means he will never sin, I believe what it does mean, is that there is no sin in his life that he is justifying, in denial about, or at peace with. He has declared war on all of it and therefore trying to reproach his life by calling him one who is unrepentant in his sin, would be a lie. He is above reproach. There isn't major sin in his life that would undermine his walk, and his battles with sin are battles with sin that he is constantly growing in as he fights the fight of faith. That is what God calls us to. When God's Word crosses your sin or your agenda, you must kill the sin, and fight the fight of faith. That is the true test of who you are before God. Julie often rightly says that you don't truly know a professing Christian until the Word of God crosses their sin and you see what they do with it. I completely agree with that. Timothy, and all Christians, are to keep this command until the coming of Christ according to the text, or until our death is also implied here. That means we never give up in this fight. It is a permanent fight that all true Christians must persevere in all of their days if they are going to be proven out to be real and truly found in Christ at the last day. If this seems overwhelming or daunting to you I want to close by giving you hope from verse 13.

9. God is our Hope in the fight (read vs. 13).

Paul is giving Timothy this charge in the presence of God and of Christ. This is a serious charge and Timothy, as well as all Christians must live with the awareness of the awesome reality that all of our lives and ministry are playing out before the presence of God and of Christ himself. That should make you tremble! Now here is the encouragement about the Father, the text says he is the one who gives life to all things. He is the God of life, the God of resurrection, which is the

Greed and its Destruction

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giving of life out of death. No matter what cost you must pay to truly follow Christ, God will sustain your life until your life has accomplished his purposes. You can't die before his appointed time comes to pass. Furthermore, he gives you spiritual and emotional life as well. When you feel completely deadened in your heart from weariness in the battle, when you feel overwhelmed by Satanic opposition, when you feel hopeless in fighting your flesh because the sinful cravings are so strong, there is a power greater than you to keep you going. That power is God himself, the giver of life! It's okay if you feel dead, take your soul to the one who raises the dead and ask for him to breathe life in you. He will do it and when he does it, he, and not your resolve, will get the glory, and your joy in him will be restored!

The last encouragement in this text is in Christ himself. Notice Paul says about Christ that, "...in his testimony before Pontius Pilate he made the good confession." What did Jesus confess? If you look at John 18:33-38 Jesus confessed that Christ is the King of an other-worldly kingdom, that he was born to bear witness to the truth, and in Jn. 19:11 he confessed that Pilate only had power over Jesus in the moment because it was given to him from above. Jesus is in the middle of an intense spiritual battle. He had just sweated blood in Gethsemane, he had just experienced the pain of the betrayal of Judas, the denial of Peter, and being deserted by his friends. He was staring in the face the drinking of the cup of God's wrath soon to come at the cross, and before Pilate, even though Jesus could have called on angels to defend him, he didn't abandon his mission, but stated his confession of faith to the highest earthly power over him at that time who could have set him free. Jesus was more than capable of convincing Pilate to let him go and if he did that he would have quit the good fight and would have lacked steadfastness. But instead he fought the good fight to the end and thus achieved our salvation by dying on the cross for the sins of his people and rising again on the 3rd day!

How is this an encouragement to weary Christians? I think it is an encouragement in the sense that Hebrews 4:14-16 reminds us that Jesus is a sympathetic High Priest who was tempted in all ways yet was without sin. He knows the temptations to get weary in the battle, he knows the temptations to greed when Satan offered him the Kingdoms of this world, he also knows the temptations to give up. But he didn't. Even when he could have, even when the stakes were the highest before Pilate, he made the good confession and finished his mission. He persevered, and he has mercy and grace for us as we draw near to him to forgive us, revive us, restore us, and help us follow him in his perseverance until his coming. So the Father is our life giver in this good fight, Jesus is our sympathetic High Priest, and by the Spirit our Triune God will display his power and glory to keep us going, only lay hold of him by faith with all steadfastness. God is better than money, he is better than your vain glorious dreams, he is better than status, he is better than sex, he is better than pride, he is greater than all things. May he come near to you now, and often in your life as you fight the good fight by faith. He loves you and he will not leave you, so let us hope in him.