



1 Timothy 6:11-21

Flee and Pursue, Guard and Avoid

3rd Sunday After Epiphany – January 22, 2017

INTRODUCTION:

My title today is: *Flee and Pursue, Guard and Avoid*. All four of these words come from our text (1Ti.6:11-21), and three of them are imperatives. This passage is full of imperatives, full of commands. Paul is telling *Timothy* what to do. And he's doing so in no uncertain terms! But still, this is anything but a harsh, commanding message.

Quite to the contrary. On the one hand, it is quite serious and solemn. Look at v.13: **13** *I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things...*, the Creator of the universe, **15** *... the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 13 ... and of Christ Jesus...* So the Father and the Son are present as Witnesses to Paul's instruction of *Timothy*. **13** *I charge you...* **14** *to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 which (God) will display at the proper time...* Paul is fixing (*Timothy's*) eyes on the return of *Christ* as he hears these commands, letting him know that his whole life is aimed in that direction. So this is, indeed, serious stuff! But it's not just heavy, impersonal rules and requirements.

This is also, on the other hand, an impassioned plea from a spiritual father to a spiritual son. It's as emotional as the ending of 2Ti.—where Paul is asking *Timothy* to *come... soon* (4:9), and bring his (*coat*) and his *books* and his (*writings*) (4:13). This passage is just more focused on instruction and obedience than on life circumstances and relationships. You hear the emotion especially in vv.11 & 20. I actually thought about titling today's message: *O*. This is Paul's closing statement in his first letter to his beloved *Timothy*, and he opens it saying: **11** *... O man of God...*, using a description for *Timothy* here that was used of Moses and Samuel and Elijah and Elisha and other great servants of *God* in the OT (Kostenberger 555). But it's not the *man of God* part that shows emotion. It's the *O* part. When do you put *O* in front of your address to someone? When you're deeply saddened by news they've shared: "O Charles, I am so sorry to hear about the loss of your father! My deepest sympathies!" Or you use it in just the opposite situation, when you're gladdened by someone's news: "O Mary, I hear you're expecting a baby! Congratulations!" You also use it when you have very important information to share with a deeply loved friend: "O *Timothy*, listen to me!" And that is just how Paul closes this letter (20): "O *Timothy*..., listen!"

This is an emotional, intimate appeal to his *true child in the faith* (1:2). And it unfolds like a musical masterpiece, a closing expression that picks up all the major themes, the melodies and harmonies, of the whole composition and finishes them off to the composer's full satisfaction. So the commands it includes direct his treasured protégé toward protecting his *life and doctrine* (4:16 NIV), toward helping him **4:16** *keep a close watch on (himself) and on the teaching...* (ESV). But we can all receive this instruction with profit. As Andreas Kostenberger summarized (555-6): *Timothy—along with every man and woman of God—is to be fueled by a strong desire to put as great a distance as possible between himself and evil, avoiding ungodly associations of any kind, (doing) everything in his power to (live) out righteousness, faith, love, and other Christian virtues. All believers are to love and do what is right (or, as Jesus put it, "hunger and thirst for righteousness," Mt 5:6); [556] cultivate godly character; trust God in all things; live a life of loving others, including friends and foes alike; and display both endurance and gentle-ness, especially in dealing with persistent opposition in the church.* Let's hear this call today under three headings.

CLOSING CHARGES TO TIMOTHY PERSONALLY 11-16, 20-21

11 ... *Flee these things.* Run full speed away from the empty, disruptive pursuits of those false teaching elders (3-10)—their activities that **4** ... *produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, 5 and constant friction among people...* When God's truth is treasured and protected, His people rally. But when it is twisted and aimed toward selfish *gain* (cf. 4), His people are agitated and injured and divided.

It was to this very same body that Paul explained how the church matures to spiritual adulthood. That happens when those He's gifted and called to teaching ministry Eph.4**15** ... *(speak) the truth in love*, enabling the whole body to *grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ*. Two verses earlier he said: **13** *until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*. True spiritual maturity is seen in the church's *(attaining) unity...*! Right along with *Timothy*, we need to *flee* the conflict-generating Scripture-twisting of any and all false teachers.

Instead, we **11** ... *Pursue righteous, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness*. This list is very similar to the one that follows Paul's *charge* in his second letter to 2Ti.2**22** ... *flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace...* We could take these words apart, then string together their definitions to hear Paul's charge toward living an upright, God-directed life of worship and service, unswerving in its commitment to the truth of the gospel we have received. But in short, I think what he really wants *Timothy*, and us, to hear is that our lives should stand in

diametric opposition to the lives of all who deny God's truth, and proclaim their own! Our lives should be aimed toward the characteristics of His Kingdom, and His Son.

I love the fact that this list of familiar virtues ends with *steadfastness* and *gentleness*. So, we're *tough* in our (*righteousness*), *godliness*, *faith* and *love*. But we're also *tender* in them! And this tough and tender (*fleeing*) and (*pursuing*) is folded together in a third command: **12** *fight the good fight of faith...* We've been called into an all-out war! But it's not like a cage fight. It's a noble, just war in defense of eternal truth and *love*. It's a tough and tender *fight* for the gospel. This battle will have us crossing swords with a gospel enemy one moment and dressing his wounds the next. It has us pressing toward an unswerving commitment to *live and proclaim the gospel with authenticity and passion*.

Next Paul calls *Timothy* to **12**... *take hold of the eternal life to which (he was) called and about which (he) made the good confession...* He's calling him to live in the power of the future hope of that he's (*confessed*) to believe in *Christ*, and (*confessed*) **12**... *in the presence of many witnesses*, quite possibly referring to his Ordination Service where his call to gospel ministry was confirmed with *many witnesses (present)*.

Now this brief statement ties together several different ideas. Once again the focus is on the end times, *eternal life*. *Timothy* should be pressing on to the finish line, like Paul is doing in his ministry (cf. Phi.3:12; 2Ti.4:7-8). So (*Timothy's*) preaching ministry is also in view—yes, in his Ordination Service, but this is also completing the *charge* to **12** *fight the good fight...* And Paul also seems to have all readers in mind here, not just *Timothy*. All of this seems to be going on at once in vv.11-12. So, what does it all mean. Here is a summary: one commentator wrote (Kostenberger 556): *Paul's exhortation for Timothy to "take hold" (epilambanomai, GK 2138) of eternal life is reminiscent of (his) own aspiration to "press on to take hold (katalambanō, GK 2898) of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of (him)" (Phi.3:12; cf. 1Co 9:24). Timothy must lay aside all fears, (doubts), and encumbrances and fight for the faith with reckless abandon, regardless of consequences. Whether it is convenient or not, Timothy must preach the gospel (2Ti 4:2). Yet not only Timothy is to embrace this goal—so is every person, including the rich (v.19). Unlike at other places, where Paul stresses the "already" side of the end-time scenario, here he emphasizes the "not yet" part of Christian existence (cf. Mounce, 365). He's saying we all do all of this, just like *Timothy*, with our eye fixed on the coming Kingdom! It is hard work, or else we wouldn't need to work so hard! It can awaken opposition (even as it is used by God to grant *peace* and *life*), but we still do it!*

And the final charge: **20** ... *Guard the good deposit entrusted to you...*, (avoiding) ^(vLT) *the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called "knowledge."* Preach the clear gospel you received and believed, *Timothy*. *Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions* from false teachers! That just leads people away from the truth! ⁽²¹⁾ We need to **11** ... *flee these things!*

CLOSING CHARGES REGARDING WEALTHY BELIEVERS 17-19

Then Paul has one final word for *Timothy* to preach to the wealthy there in Ephesus. There must have been a lot of them, as there are today. So this is a helpful word. **17** ... *Charge them not to be haughty...* toward others who are not wealthy. **17** ... *Charge them not to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches but on God*, just like the *widows* need to do ^(5:5). **17** ... *Charge them...* **18** ... *to do good, to be rich and good works, and to be generous and ready to share* with those in need. In so doing they will **19** ... *(store) up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.*

Do you hear the connection between this instruction to the *rich* a Paul's urging of *Timothy* to *fight the good fight of faith?* ⁽¹²⁾ On both battle fronts, the calling is to let nothing displace the preeminence of God and His truth in day to day life. On the one front, don't let the *different doctrine* ^(1:3; 6:3) of the false teachers throw you off in the truth you proclaim or the truth you believe and live. As Paul already wrote: **4:16** *keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching...* And on the other front, you who are wealthy, don't **17** ... *set (your) hopes on the uncertainty of riches but on God*, Don't let anything displace Him as preeminent in your *life* and your affections—certainly not your money! It is not your financial investments in IRAs 401(k)s that sets you up well for the *future*. Rather, it is by **18** ... *(doing) good, ... (being) rich in good works, and (being) generous, ready to share!* This is how you **19** ... *(store) up treasure for (yourself) as a good foundation for the future, so that (you) may, like Timothy* ⁽¹²⁾, *take hold of—eternal life* ⁽¹²⁾—*that which is truly life!* You use your wealth, not so much as a source of security in this *life*, but as a manifestation of *life* in the world to come!

CLOSING CHARGES TO GRACE CHURCH OF DUPAGE

And that is where we can turn our attention toward closing charges from 1Ti. to Grace Church of DuPage. In Paul's closing words we hear the final movement of this grand symphony of instruction he's composed for *Timothy* and the church in all generations. We hear what it looks like to be passionately devoted to the purity of the gospel, proclaiming it and living it with our eyes fixed on its ultimate end: the *life which is truly life*, the eternal Kingdom of *God!*

We hear what it looks like for the church to be the church, in *(Timothy's)* day and in ours. We hear what it looks like to be citizens of heaven living on earth—what it looks like when the coming, *future* Kingdom breaks in to the present age. Everything changes! 2Co.5¹⁷ ... *The old has passed away; behold, the new has come!* We're serving the Lord Jesus Christ Who 2Co.5¹⁵ ... *died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.* We're living as people who 2Co.4¹⁸ ... *look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen, like riches in this world, are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.* This sounds so clear, but looking away from the *seen* to the *unseen* is no easy calling. One of the clearest places to test how we're doing is right here in Paul's word to the wealthy. Whom/What do we trust when we're in need? God? Or money?

As a church here at the threshold of 2017, we're in a place where we need to trust God as our Provider, rather than looking to our bank balance. This tests us in two ways: 1) are we directed by God in our planning, and 2) are we then willing to look to Him to provide for that which He directs. Put another way, will we trust the god of this age (money), or 15 ... *the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see—(He who is worthy of) honor and eternal dominion?!* Whom/What will we trust?!

So, what are our closing charges to Grace Church of DuPage? Just what you see here: 11 ... *flee these things*, the misdirected teachings we routinely encounter in this *life*. 11 ... *Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.* 12 *Fight the good fight of faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called!* Live as though you actually believe what you (*confess*) to believe about *Jesus!* 20 ... *Guard the good deposit entrusted to you.* And by all means, do not miss Paul's brief and parting reminder of how all of this is possible—how our *righteousness* (12) avoids being *self-righteousness*, and how our *godliness, faith, and love* (12) become *sincere* (1:5) rather than sappy self-deception. He says it in his final words: 18 ... *Grace be with you.* O Grace Church, hear this word from God! And by His grace, live up to your name!