

Fight the Good Fight

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[0 : 00] Well, I wonder if you recognize this movie or not. Is that how you start your morning?

Is that how I tenderize my meat?

That's my Sunday afternoon return. The movie is Rocky.

Rocky, yeah, I set this up and then I realized afterwards that it tells you at the bottom of the screen. I like to make things easy for you. But it's, of course, Sylvester Stallone as Rocky who works hard every day to fight the good fight as the underdog boxer against his seemingly stronger opponents. Now, why am I showing you all this? Well, because today Paul finishes his first letter to Timothy, telling him to fight the good fight, not of boxing, but of the Christian faith against his seemingly godlier opponents, who are not actually more godly, but they do seem to love money.

[1 : 38] And so Paul begins in the blue corner, as it were, with the opponents. Point one, verse one, verse two to five, actually. He says, If these things you are to teach and assist on, all the things that he's written, we've looked at over the past few weeks, if anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree to the sound instruction, the sound doctrine of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, they are conceited and understand nothing.

They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between people of corrupt mind who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

Paul speaks again about the false teachers that we've seen before in verse three, teaching what does not agree with the sound instruction or doctrine of Jesus.

In other words, they teach unsound doctrine, which we've seen before included things like chapter four, where they forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, claiming it makes you more godly.

In chapter one, this unsound doctrine was partly because of their unhealthy desire to be teachers of the Old Testament law when they had no clue what they were talking about. And here in verse four, this unsound doctrine comes from an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels.

[3 : 18] In other words, they like to argue. In fact, the word unhealthily means sick or morbid desire. They have a morbid desire for arguments. Have you ever met people who just like to argue, contradict you just for the sake of it?

But this leads then in the rest of verse four to envy, strife, malicious talk, and so on. In other words, to ungodly behavior.

You see, they have an unhealthy desire for arguments, which robs them of the truth such that they teach unsound doctrine, which then leads to ungodly behavior.

They're undone people. But notice the process. It's unhealthy desire, which then gets them to change the doctrine of Jesus to unsound doctrine, which then leads to ungodly behavior.

And it's worth noticing this process because we can see it in our world amongst other churches even. Those who have an unhealthy desire to connect with our culture no matter what, even if it means compromising the gospel.

[4 : 31] And so they do. They compromise the gospel and have unsound doctrine, which then leads to ungodly behavior as God sees it.

Whether they've modified the sound teaching of Jesus when it comes to judgment, which no one likes talking about, understandably, or modified the teaching with the current hot topics of gender and marriage, or even modified Jesus' teaching about how to be saved.

And so some churches seek to work with all religions. And yes, we're to respect and love all people, but they want to encourage all religions when I'm pretty sure Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through him. And so the first application for us this morning is, don't fall for letting our desires shape our doctrine and in turn our behavior like these opponents. Even if you think it's a good and loving desire, because our sinful nature corrupts our desires, doesn't it? Rather, we are to stick with the sound doctrine of our Lord, Jesus Christ, as Paul calls Jesus, who knows what is truly good and loving, doesn't he?

[5 : 51] And so we're to let his sound teaching shape both our desires and our behavior. But second, don't fall for the love of money either.

You see, within this broad category of unhealthy interest, which led to unsound doctrine and ungodly behavior, this broad category was a specific motive for money. Because at the end of verse 5, notice what their godliness is aimed at? They think their godliness is a means to financial gain.

You see, like today, religious teachers back then were supported by others, but they thought if they abstained from certain foods and from marriage, then, you know, they'd look super spiritual and people would give them more financial support.

But fake godliness or financial gain is not gain at all. Rather, Paul goes to say in verse 6, godliness with contentment, that is great gain.

[6 : 57] You see, true godliness with contentment is gain. At first, because godliness is good for us. We saw this a couple of weeks ago, where Paul said in chapter 4, godliness has value for all things, holding promise both for the present life and the age to come.

It holds the promise of true life. That is, it shows us how to live the life God wants us to live, both in this world and the world to come. It's good for us.

And contentment is good for us. Why? Well, Paul goes to say in verse 7, for we brought nothing out into the world and we can take nothing out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, we'll be content with that.

Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.

Some people eager for money have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. Here are four reasons why contentment is good for us. First, in verse 7, it saves us from a futile pursuit because verse 7, we brought nothing into the world so we can take nothing out of it.

[8 : 10] We can pursue money, you know, really hard all through life, but when we die, you can't take it with you, can you? Okay, contentment saves us from this futile pursuit.

Second, verse 9, those who want to get rich also fall into temptation, which leads to their ruin, like the temptation of fraud. Do you remember Elizabeth Holmes?

She was a CEO and started up a biotech company in California a few years ago, claiming that her technology could detect hundreds of diseases with just a couple of drops of blood.

And she took over \$700 million from investors before she was found out to be a fraud, that her technology was, you know, didn't work.

And she went to jail two years ago. She lost her appeal earlier this year. Her love of money led to the temptation, or falling into the temptation of fraud, and has now caused her ruin.

[9 : 10] But contentment saves us from that, doesn't it? Or verse 9, it's not just temptations, but he also says, and traps that people fall into, like the trap of gambling debt.

So those who want to get rich quick may gamble, and while gambling itself is not a sin, the greed behind gambling is a sin. And those who love money keep gambling, and how often do they win?

They keep losing, don't they? And so they find themselves trapped in debt, which leads to ruin.

There are countless stories of people who have been ruined by gambling debt.

You see, the love of money leads to temptations and traps that then in turn leads to ruin and destruction. But contentment saves us from all that. Third, verse 10, that love of money is a root from which sprouts all kinds of evil, like ripping off other people.

It's happened to some of our people in our church, actually. And it happened to a different person just three weeks ago. And even non-Christians recognize that ripping off elderly people is evil.

[10 : 29] Or in the words of this next video, The biggest lowlife on the planet. They are the words of an NAB branch manager who stopped a scammer from fleecing an elderly woman of her life savings.

The biggest lowlife on the planet. In other words, evil, right? Even non-Christians recognize this as evil. The love of money is a root that causes all kinds of evil, which contentment saves us from.

And fourth and worst of all, verse 10, some who are eager for money have wandered from the faith, which means not only ruin and grief, but unless they repent, it will mean hell later.

I know of a guy from an old church and an old friend of my wife's. Both started off attending church, but both were eager for money and the prestige that it brought. And so both have wandered from the faith.

And unless they repent, they are in danger of hell. Now, yes, we all need money. We all have to pay our bills and provide for our families. So we all need a source of money, whether it's work or super or a pension or Centrelink.

[11:38] And yes, I'm sure we could all use more money, couldn't we? Yet we're not to let our need for money become a love of money. For it plunges us into all those problems.

And one way to protect us is by being content. And that's why Paul says, but godliness with contentment is great gain. Of course, it's not always easy to be content when we see others who have more than us or we're bombarded with adverts and TV shows telling us that we need more than the basics of food, clothing and shelter.

Our TV shows like Better Homes and Gardens. I'm sure they give you helpful tips. But I bet you've never heard of a TV show called Perfectly Adequate Homes and Gardens.

Have you? Of course not. We're told that we need more. We're taught not to be content, you see. And so we need to pray for God's help to remember what the love of money leads to and to being content instead.

Unlike the opponents, we're not to fall into letting our desires shape our doctrine and in turn our behaviour, nor are we to fall in love with money. And what follows in the rest of the passage is really the flip side of those two topics.

[12:56] As Paul now directly addresses Timothy and the rich. Point to verse 11. So here in the red corner is Timothy, the man of God.

And he's firstly to flee all this, run away from it. From what? Well, the love of money and especially those unhealthy desires that lead to unsound doctrine and in turn ungodly behaviour.

And I say especially because he is the church leader in Ephesus. That's why Paul calls him man of God, which was a title used for Moses and the prophets in the Old Testament.

Those who were appointed to speak God's word to God's people. And as such, Timothy's teaching and behaviour more generally could especially influence the church for either good or bad, couldn't it?

And so in the rest of verse 11, Timothy is then to pursue godly behaviour like righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.

[14:16] Unlike his opponent's maliciousness. And notice there in verse 11, there's no mention of contentment, is there? Now, no doubt it's still part of godly behaviour, but Paul's focus here is wider than just money.

It's godly behaviour generally. And in verse 12, Timothy is to fight the good fight of the faith, the Christian faith, the sound doctrine of our Lord Jesus.

Now, for Timothy as a man of God, the church leader in Ephesus, it meant upholding it and teaching it in the face of his opponents who have compromised it and changed it.

It's what Paul will go on to talk about in verses 13 to 16, where he charges Timothy in the sight of God and of Jesus. Jesus, whose testimony and good confession before Pilate was made more by his actions than his words.

Jesus didn't say a whole lot before Pilate, you might remember. But he did show himself to be God's king because he willingly went to die for our sin on the cross, didn't he? And so Timothy verse 14 is to keep this command, which I think is a way of saying keep this gospel without spot and blame, without compromise or change, unlike his opponents.

[15:38] He said, keep it faithfully until Jesus' return, which, verse 15, the only true God will bring about in his own time. Paul says something similar towards the end of the letter in verse 20, when he says, Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care.

What has been entrusted to his care? The gospel. He is to guard it by turning away from the godless chatter and opposing ideas that the opponents are all into, the unhealthy interest in words and controversies.

The point is, this is what it means for Timothy to fight the good fight back in verse 12. It means for him to uphold the gospel and to teach it faithfully.

But does that now mean that these instructions in verse 11 and 12 are just for Timothy like the other instructions in 13 to 16? Well, no.

Because as people of God, are we not also, verse 11, to flee the love of money and unsound doctrine? Are we not also, verse 11, to pursue godliness?

[16:45] Of course we are. What's more, for Timothy to fight the good fight of the faith also meant believing it and living it himself.

That is, he is to fight the good fight of the faith, not just as a church leader, but also as a Christian himself. And we too are Christians, aren't we? And so these verses are for us as well.

In fact, the fighting the good fight is how both Timothy and we take hold of eternal life in verse 12.

The eternal life that Christ won for us and God promised us when we believe in Jesus.

And so in the rest of verse 12, it talks about when Timothy made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. It's probably talking about when he believed in Jesus and was baptized in front of many people.

Because in the early church, remember, believing and being baptized kind of went hand in hand. It was like boom, boom, straight after each other. In fact, in the New Testament, it often uses baptism as a symbol for conversion because they happen so close together.

[17:57] And so the moment we believe in Jesus, the moment we make the good confession that he is our Lord and Savior who died for our sin, God promises us, calls us to life eternal.

And so if you want the guarantee of life eternal, then believe in Jesus. Confess him, your Lord and Savior who died to pay for your sin and rose again.

Believe in Jesus and God will give you, call you to eternal life. But for us who already do believe, then the way we are to take hold of that in verse 12 is by keep fighting the good fight of the faith.

Keep clinging to Christ. Keep believing in Jesus such that we keep following him in life. We're to flee the ungodly stuff in verse 11 and pursue the godly stuff.

We're to fight the good fight of the faith. But it does take everyday effort. I mean, the word fight conjures up effort, you know, work, doesn't it?

[19:02] And we saw that with Rocky who trained every day. It's fighting every day to flee from sin and follow Jesus. It's fighting every day to uphold the faith by being known as a Christian and perhaps having opportunities to commend Christ to others even in the face of possible rejection.

It's fighting every day to persevere in the faith even when life is hard. Whether it's hard because of suffering or temptation or all the other things that demand our attention.

And so for one person I know, they make an effort every day to pray and read the Bible even when life is really busy and stressful. In fact, they've said it's what keeps them sane.

For others, when holidays come, whether it's uni holidays for some I know or holidays from work, when they take them they make sure they don't take a holiday from God at the same time.

Or for a family I know, it's making sure that the kids don't determine if they come to church or not, you know. The kid's mood is not what determines whether they go, it's God. And so they make every effort to come every Sunday.

[20:15] Here are three examples of people fighting the good fight of the faith despite all the other things that demand our attention. I've been talking with someone from our church this week about a funeral that she's going to that's being conducted by a celebrant rather than a minister.

And most there will be non-Christians who currently reject Jesus though fortunately she's been asked to do a reading, a Bible reading. And so I've been chatting about what would be appropriate, connect with a person who passed but also point people to Jesus because that's what she wants to do.

In fact they're going to ask if they can also do the Lord's Prayer and she's going to add a little brief explanation to just two verses. Here is someone who's seeking to uphold the faith in the face of possible rejection by all these non-Christians.

Or another person at our church who started a new training course two months ago. They're in one of my Bible study groups and I remember their first prayer point was not that they would pass the course although they're keen to pass but that they would be a good witness.

That they'd be known as a Christian and have opportunities to share the gospel. Here is another person. In fact here are two people who are gently fighting to uphold the faith even in the face of possible rejection.

[21 : 38] Or I remember at our 1030 service who had a spinal cord injury and has been paralysed from the waist down for the last 38 years. Can you imagine that? And then around this time last year she was diagnosed with lung cancer even though she's never smoked.

And while the treatment she's receiving is effective it's only effective in giving her a few more years. It's not a cure. I interviewed her around this time last year and she was saying she didn't use the words that she was fighting the good fight but she was basically do that by reading her Bible every day in her words the more I study the Bible the more I feel his love and mercy and because of Jesus I know I will live on in a better place.

I know God is sovereign and he holds our future and one day Jesus will raise and restore my body fully. Here is someone who's fighting the good fight you see every day and what's more she wants to keep serving as she's able and so she does welcoming at our 1030 service.

You might even see her at the door in her wheelchair handing out bulletins. Here's one example of a person fighting the good fight of the faith despite suffering. I was looking for a way of trying to summarise this fighting of the good fight idea and illustrate it and to by surprise AI came up with it and so I googled and this was AI's overview.

The phrase fight the good fight of the faith is a metaphor for persevering in one's Christian beliefs and living a life that reflects those beliefs even when facing challenges or opposition.

[23 : 18] It's about staying true to one's faith holding on to hope and continuing to serve God despite difficulties. It even then gave me an illustration of a marathon runner. It seems AI is getting better.

Maybe it'll soon replace me as pastor. Though it didn't mention that we're fighting for the good fight. That is, it's a worthwhile fight.

The Christian faith is worth fighting for. For it not only comes with life eternal, it's for our good and God's glory now. And so like Timothy, we're to fight the good fight of the faith.

Which includes being content and for those who are rich being generous. Verse 17. Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Now I don't know about you, but I always think the rich are not me, but someone else. Those who have way more than me. You know, the Bill Gates, the Gina Reinharts of the world.

[24 : 27] But richness is relative. I mean, other people in the world would consider every person in this room rich simply because we live in Australia. And if we look back in verse 8, it says we're to be content with the basics like food and clothing and you'd probably include shelter.

And so I wonder if the rich might be all of us who have more than the basics. I'm sure there's degrees of richness, but I wonder if it includes more than just the Bill Gates and Gina Reinharts of the world.

I wonder if it includes all who have money to save or to spend after paying for the basics. Either way, like our first reading, we're not to put our hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, and we know that, don't we?

You know, the bank accounts always seem to go down faster than they go up. Rather, we're to hope in God who is certain, who remains the same yesterday, today, and forever.

And what's more, we're to hope in God since he's the one who gives us wealth and everything else to start with. But notice this doesn't mean we cannot spend money on ourselves, for it says God richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

[25 : 43] And so we can take a holiday, we can buy a takeaway, and so on. But it does mean we will not spend it all on ourselves, but be generous, verse 18.

Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share, he says. Those who have more money than what our basic needs require are not only to enjoy things as gifts from God, but also use them to do good, like providing for widows and widowers in need, as we heard last week.

Only here it's to be willing to share with everyone, I take it, who are in need. But notice this doing good is described in terms of being rich or generous in good deeds, and being generous and willing to share.

Now, if you're anything like me, the hard part is not willing to share. The hard part is being generous. I mean, I'm happy to share a bit that doesn't cost me that much, but being generous when it does cost me, that's way harder, isn't it?

And so to encourage us, Paul adds in verse 19, that it's worth it. For in this way, they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for true life that will last an eternity, as opposed to storing up treasure on earth as a foundation for this life, which will not last an eternity.

[27 : 08] And by doing so, it protects us as well from the love of money that might cause us to wander from the faith, and so helps us to take hold, verse 19, of the life that is truly life.

If you have money to save or spend after paying for your basic needs, then yes, use it for your enjoyment, but also use it to be generous to others in need, like giving to the Benevolent Fund I mentioned last week, because generosity will also protect us from holding on too tightly to money in this life and lay up treasure for us in the next.

And so to finish, the application for this week is really two sides of two coins. First of his sword, and the first part of the passage, don't fall for our desires, then letting shape our doctrine and then our behaviour, but in the second half of the passage, on the flip side, but fight the good fight of the faith every day.

Hold on to the true, sound doctrine of the Lord Jesus. Keep living it out, no matter what. And the second coin was, don't fall for the love of money like the opponents, but on the flip side, be content. Put your hope in God and be content. Enjoy with thanks and be generous. Bluetooth Bluetooth Bluetooth