TAKE HOLD OF THE ETERNAL LIFE

1 Timothy 6:1-21

Key Verse: 12

“Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.”

Thank God for showing us what is really honourable before him – labouring in preaching and teaching the gospel, the truth of God’s word, which is worthy of double honour. In this chapter, Paul makes a sharp contrast between false teachers, the men of the world and of Satan, and Timothy, a man of God. False teachers are lovers of the world and lovers of money with hope in this presence age, but a man of God is different in the lifestyle, pursuit, and hope. May we discern this difference and clearly know the way we should go.

In verses 1 and 2, Paul tells slaves that they should consider their masters worthy of full respect. If the masters are believers, the slaves are to serve them better for the sake of God’s name and effective teaching, not taking advantage of their brotherhood in Christ Jesus. Then Paul says, “These are the things you are to teach and urge on them.” “These” can be all Paul had said until now, including his instructions regarding those who wronged widows, elders, and slaves.

Then verse 3 says, “If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching...”. Here “false doctrines” is in other translations, “another doctrine” or “a different doctrine.” “Teaching another/a different doctrine” is one word in Greek, *heterodidaskaleó*. And “the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ” is the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ. This can refer to the Scriptures, for Colossians 3:16 says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly”, and 1 Thessalonians 1:8, “The word (in Greek *logos*) of the Lord rang out from you…” and 2 Thessalonians 3:1, “…the word of the Lord may spread rapidly.” And “godly teaching” is “the teaching/doctrine that accords to godliness/conforming godliness.” The ultimate test of truth is resulting in godliness leading to salvation. We really thank God that we have the Bible, the Scriptures. The words of the Bible are our sole standard for our lives and the world. We should really do our best to know the words of Bible correctly so that we can discern false doctrines, doctrine of demons. We need the attitude of Bereans, who received Paul’s message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true (Ac 17:11). We also should examine ourselves whether the word of God produces godliness in life. This is as Paul said to Timothy in 4:16, “Watch your life and doctrine closely…if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.”

And verse 4 says, “he is conceited and understands nothing.” “Being conceited” is in other translations, “being puffed up with conceit” or “being proud.” Conceit or pride is the very nature of sin. The final punch of the devil toward Eve was, “You will be like God.” We know that people are very much concerned about how to be prosperous and successful in the world, regardless of being right or truthful. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 8:1, “We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up…”. Here Paul clearly said, “he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing.” What a strong statement! However knowledgeable or intellectual he is, he understands nothing. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:14, “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.” Jesus once said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure” (Mt 11:25-26; Lk 10:21). Unless God reveals the truth, no human mind can grasp it.

Paul continues in verses 4 and 5, “He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between men of corrupt minds, who have been robbed of the truth and who think godliness is means to financial gain.” This is the third time Paul talked about the character of false teachers. In 1:4-7, “they devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies which promote controversies. Wandering away from a sincere faith they turned to meaningless talk. They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm.” And according to 4:2, spreading doctrine of demons they are hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. Here in 6:4-5 Paul gets into the very character of the teachers of false doctrines, using the terms, ‘unhealthy interest’, ‘controversies’ ‘quarrels’, ‘envy’, ‘strife’, ‘malicious/abusive talk’, ‘evil suspicions’, ‘constant friction’, ‘corrupt mind’, ‘robbed of the truth’ and ‘financial gain.’ Especially the word “unhealthy” is in Greek *noseó,* meaning being sickly and diseased. With an unhealthy interest and a sick craving, they spread false teaching which is a deadly disease like AIDS, (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). The symptoms are described here. Especially, as for “constant friction between men of corrupt mind,” one (Chrysostom) expressed that it was like two diseased sheep rubbing their diseases into each other. They are robbed of the truth and misunderstand godliness, relating it to money.

Now Paul says in 6, “But godliness with contentment is great gain.” What is contentment? It is in Greek, *Autarkeia*, meaning, “self-satisfaction”, “self-sufficiency.” Yet, contentment in godliness is not sufficiency in ourselves. It is God’s sufficiency in us. It is having in our hearts God whose grace is always sufficient (2 Cor 12:9). This contentment is to be satisfied and thankful for what God has given us in whatever situation and depend on him, who richly provides us for everything for our enjoyment. It is to serve God in any circumstances, giving him what is due to him from whatever we have. If one thinks, “I can serve God and give to him, when God gives me more,” that’s not contentment. There will be no contentment in the thought that I need more and more and more. Our contentment does not rely on how much we have but on our realization of God’s sufficient provision in whatever situation we may be in. We can call it godly contentment. Paul says of his contentment in Philippians 4:11-13, “…I have learned to be content whatever circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.” And he prays in 4:19 for the Macedonian churches who gave to God out of their extreme poverty, “My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”

Paul continues here in verse 7, “For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.” This is a self-evident truth. No one denies this. However, not many people truly recognize this. This truth is so important that it is written 3 times in the Bible. Job said in Job 1:21, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.” Job made this confession when all things including his children were gone at a moment. Ecclesiastes 5:15 says, “Naked a man comes from his mother’s womb, and as he comes, so he departs. He takes nothing from his labour that he can carry in his hand.” No one can take his car or house or bank account with him on his departure from this world. Yet, there are many people who accumulate things of this world more and more and spend only for themselves and their families, and have to leave all their possessions behind at the end of their lives for the use of others, even those they do not love but hate (Ecc 2:18-19).

Paul continues in verse 8, “But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.” This is contentment with just the necessities of life, like our shelter. It is a simple way of living. Jesus said in Luke 12:15, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

Then Paul says in verses 9-10, “People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men 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.” We are to know that contentment and the love of money cannot go together. Ecclesiastes 5:10 says, “Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income...” Hebrews 13:5 says, “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have…” In the last days, people become lovers of money rather than lovers of God (2 Tim 3:2-4). Here, Paul clearly says that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, though money itself is not. There’s nothing inherently wrong with money. Money is like a sword or gun – if used correctly like hunting for food, it is useful; if not, it is dangerous. What a life in which lovers of money fall into temptation and a trap, being harmed and hurt and pierced by unreasonable and harmful desires and finally plunged into ruin and destruction (1 Thes 5:3; Rev 17:8). Jesus clearly said, “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money” (Mt 6:24; Lk 16:13). Yet, there are many Christians who serve both God and Money. We should watch out for the love of money, whether it is getting into our hearts or germinating there, clearly knowing that contentment and the love of money are exclusive.

When we learn to be content, I believe that God can make us rich. But if we become rich first, without learning contentment, that’s a disaster in life. God made Abraham rich, but he knew how to handle it. When there was a conflict between him and his nephew Lot, who was very selfish, Abraham gave Lot the choice to choose, willing to give up a good land for the honour of God. He ruled over material things and so was victorious over money. Again, we should know that contentment and the love of money are not inclusive, but totally exclusive.

Let’s read verse 11. “But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.” What a transition from the men of money, the men of the world or the ean of Satan to a man of God! It is very interesting that a man of God refers to a particular person, Timothy, only in the New Testament, while in the Old Testament, it refers specifically to Moses and Samuel to whom the word of God came and so who delivered the words to the people of God. Paul must have been so disgusted with the false teachers but so encouraged to see Timothy, a man of God, who was like an oasis in a desert. God’s man is to be distinguished from the world’s man or Satan’s man. God’s man knows what to flee from and what to pursue. Paul says, “flee from all this” certainly including the love of money and false doctrines and unhealthy interest. And he says, “pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness/meekness. Jesus said in Matthew 5:6, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” Godliness which we have been thinking along in this book can be Christlikeness. How important faith is in our Christian life! The life we live in Christ is to live by faith, trusting in God fully and facing any situation with faith in God (Mk 11:22). Love goes together with faith. Living a life of faith contains living a life of love, loving God and loving our neighbour. Endurance is not a passive attitude but a positive one knowing that God works for the good of those who love him and who have been called according to his purpose. Concerning gentleness, Paul said in Philippians 4:5, “Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.” These are all beautiful virtues God’s man is to pursue.

Now let’s read verse 12, “Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.” A man of God surely is a man of the truth. He is to fight the good fight of the faith, for the truth. Paul also said in 1:18, “Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophesies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience.” In this last chapter, Paul confirms that Timothy should fight the good fight in the battle for the truth, certainly against the false teachers, more fundamentally against the devil, Satan, who is the father of lies. A man of God cannot avoid this fight.

Then Paul says, “Take hold of the eternal life…” It seems to be a sudden command, irrelevant to fighting the good fight. However, while the command, “fight the good fight of the faith” is more external, ‘take hold of the eternal life,’ is an internal struggle. When we think of the command, “take hold of the eternal life”, one can question, “why do we need to do this?”, for the eternal life is given to us through our faith.” John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Romans 6:23 says, “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life.” Eternal life is the free gift of God to those who believe. Here, we see an important spiritual lesson that though the eternal life is given, we are to take hold of it. Taking hold of the eternal life is certainly related to holding onto the gospel. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:1-2, “I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken you stand. By this gospel you are saved, if hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.” What can be more important than the salvation of our souls. Jesus said in Mark 8:36, “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?” Lovers of money can forfeit their souls. It will not be good for them to forfeit their souls or to lose their lives, even if they can gain the whole wealth of the world.

The eternal life cannot even be obtained by all the wealth of this world. It is God’s gift, freely given but through the very life of God’s Son Christ Jesus, his very blood, (the life of every creature is its blood according to Leviticus 17:14). It is through redemption in Christ Jesus, the forgiveness of sins by his blood, for “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Heb 9:22). As we studied, 1 Timothy 2:5-6 says, “There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men.” Through Christ Jesus who gave his life as ransom, we have been redeemed and purchased and so have eternal life. How precious this eternal life is! This is the most valuable thing in this perishing world. God’s command is that we must take hold of it, not letting it go, whatever the cost is.

A was broke out in a nation. A woman suddenly delivered a baby outside. The sound of the enemy’s gun shooting was getting closer and closer. To survive, the woman had to run leaving her baby behind. But she would not do so as a mother. It was a cold winter. She put all her clothes on the baby and tightly embraced her baby. After several days she died of the cold. At that moment an American couple was passing by and heard a crying baby. They quickly buried the mother and took the baby, and later on came to America, adopting the child as their son. They raised their adopted son well. When the son became 20 years old, he suddenly asked his father, “Daddy, why am I not white?” The Father answered, “My son, I have been waiting for this moment,” and told him the whole story. The son cried a lot and soon after he came to the place where his mother died and he was born. He took of his clothes and bowed down shedding many tears out of great thanks to his mother. As for us, we are forever thankful and eternally grateful to God who gave us eternal life at the cost of the very life of His Son. We should not take it for granted. We should not make light of it. We should take hold of it, growing in an ever-thankful heart to God for his love.

Taking hold of the eternal life is connected to setting our hearts on things above. Colossians 3:1-2 says, “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set you minds on things above, not on earthly things.” It is to know that our citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20). With our heavenly citizenship we are looking forward the coming kingdom of Christ. Those who take hold of the eternal life are the ones who have eternal perspective of life. Those false teachers, having been robbed of the truth, did not have this eternal perspective of life. Their view of life was temporal, being nearsighted with an earthbound hope. We do not just live in this temporal world but with the hope of the eternal kingdom of God in Christ Jesus. This eternal perspective of life really shapes our lifestyle in this world.

Paul says continually here, “Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.” Our calling is to eternity beyond this world. One’s confession before God and people is significant. That’s why we share our testimonies, which God remembers.

And then Paul says in verses 13-14, “In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.” God gives life to all, making all alive (Ro 4:17). Christ Jesus made a good confession before Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world. I am a king. I came into the world to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me” (Jn 18:36-37). In the sight of this God and of Christ Jesus, Paul charges Timothy to keep this command, “Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of eternal life…”, to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of the Lord Christ Jesus or the end of his life. What a solemn charge! This solemn charge is to you and to me also.

Then suddenly doxology comes out of his heart, “which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honour and might forever. Amen.” In 1:17, the doxology was, “Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever Amen.” This doxology came when Paul thought about Jesus from whom people receive eternal life through faith in him. Here also the doxology came when Paul thought about the eternal life. When Paul says, who alone is immortal,” he stresses that the immortal, eternal God is different from mortal human beings, particularly human kings like Roman emperors. The eternal God gave us eternal life through his Son, Christ Jesus. God is inherently eternal. He is the blessed God, perfectly happy and sovereign Ruler over all as the King of kings and Lord of lords. Honour and glory and might belong to him, forever praised. When we fight the good fight of the faith, taking hold of the eternal life, the only Ruler, our sovereign God is with us.

Then Paul gives some instructions for the rich and comes back to the main theme of this book, which is guarding the truth, and then competes this epistle. There were rich people in the church like masters of the slaves. Paul here does not condemn the rich, but gives a clear direction. They are not to be arrogant nor put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but in God. Paul helps Timothy to command the rich to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. One can be rich in God’s blessing. One’s riches can utterly corrupt the person, who could have been better off without the wealth. Or one can lay up treasure for eternity by being rich towards God (Lk 12:21), being rich in good deeds for God’s kingdom and so taking hold of the life that is truly life. Jesus said in Luke 16:9, “I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.” It teaches us how to invest our money in this world. It is to make investment for making eternal friends. Jesus said in Matthew 6:20, “But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” The treasure of our wealth, our money, can direct our hearts to the earth or to heaven, to the earthly life or the life that is truly life.

Then Paul says in verses 20 and 21, “Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith. Grace be with you.” Finally, Paul commands Timothy to guard the truth.

Thank God for his words. God wants us to be content whatever circumstance watching out for the love of money. May we fight the good fight of the faith for truth, taking hold of the eternal life freely given to us yet through the unpayable cost of the very life of God’s Son, our Lord Christ Jesus.