



C. S. Lewis wrote, “He who has God and everything else has no more than he who has God only.” When Christ is your treasure, you learn to be content in all circumstances. You won’t crave anything else apart from Christ. His love will be the motivating force of your life. That’s what today’s text is about:

***THE DISTINGUISHING MARKS
OF A MAN OF GOD***

**1 Timothy 6:11-16
(p. 934, pew Bible)**

Please follow along in your copy of God’s word as I read aloud 1 Timothy 6:11-16:

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 Pontius Pilate made the good confession,¹⁴ to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ,¹⁵ which he will display at the proper time—he who is 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. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.

God’s word is always relevant, always timely. But every now and then I am astounded at God’s providential timing in the preaching of certain passages. This is one of those occasions. Today’s text sets before us “the distinguishing marks of a man of God” at a time when we’re considering various men for the office of elder and one brother for the position of Associate Pastor. These are significant moments in the life of the church. While we should care deeply about such matters, no one cares more deeply about the church than the Lord Jesus Christ, who “loved the church and gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God’s word” (Eph. 5:25b-26 NLT). Christ is Head of the Church, and he wants men after his own heart leading his church. Jesus wants men who can say, as Paul did, “Follow me as I follow Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1).

***A man of God exemplifies
active allegiance to his King.***

This past week thousands of pastors gathered for the Shepherds Conference at Grace Community Church in California, where John MacArthur has served as a pastor-teacher for over half a century. Years ago when I was a young pastor, I attended the Shepherds

Conference and heard John MacArthur preach on this text. I never forgot the outline of his sermon because it arises straight from the text. A man of God is known by what he *flees from*, what he *follows after*, what he *fight for*, and what he is *faithful to*. These are the distinguishing marks of a man of God. Let's consider each of them briefly.

What he flees from (v. 11a)

“But as for you, O man of God, flee these things” (v. 11). The word “but” signals a contrast between the “man of God” and the false teachers Paul has been warning Timothy about in this letter, as recently as the previous paragraph (vv. 3-10). A false teacher is characterized by arrogance, ignorance, argumentativeness, and a desire to be rich. But a “man of God” is consumed with Christ and is unquestionably loyal to him.

By calling Timothy a “man of God.” Paul is reminding Timothy of the dignity of his calling as a Christian and as a minister of the gospel. As a believer in Christ, Timothy belongs to God. He is God’s own possession. There is no higher calling, no greater privilege, than to be loved by God, to belong to God, to be marked out as a man of God.

The phrase “man of God” first appears in Deuteronomy 33:1, where Moses is called “the man of God.” Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, and other prophets were also called men of God. This designation was reserved for men who proclaimed God’s word. Now Paul includes Timothy in this line of godly men because he, too, faithfully proclaimed God’s word.

The only other use of this phrase appears in 2 Timothy, where Paul states, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the *man of God* may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Though Paul wrote these words to Timothy as a minister of the gospel, they apply to any believer, since God’s word equips every Christian for good works.

This was important for Timothy to know, for he faced significant challenges in Ephesus. False teachers had infiltrated the church and were causing all sorts of problems. Three times throughout this letter – in the beginning (1:3-7), in the middle (4:1-5), and near the end (6:3-10) – Paul emphasizes the danger of false teachers. But after each warning he also charges Timothy to be true to his calling, to remain loyal to Christ.

For Timothy to be faithful, he must flee certain things. Paul says, “But you, O man of God, flee these things” (1 Tim. 6:11a). What things? All the sins that stem from toxic cravings, most notably the love of money (1 Tim. 6:9-10). “The desire to be rich” leads to other sins like selfishness, covetousness, envy, cheating, stealing, lying, violence, and the like. These are sins that people commit to get money. Then once they have it, they commit additional sins like gluttony, drunkenness, controlling or manipulating people, neglecting those in need, exploiting the weak, and so on and so forth.

Paul says, “But you, O man of God, flee these things” (v. 11a). This past Wednesday I met with a group of inmates at Monroe County Jail. One guy looked to be in his late-30s and had a strong, athletic build. Turns out he played semi-professional football and was married with nine children. He told me it was his first time in jail and that he intended it to be his last. He had done something foolish and was now suffering the consequences

of his actions. As we went around the room sharing prayer requests, he expressed his thanks to God for providing financially for his family. He had received some money that he had been expecting, and along with thanking the Lord, this man asked for prayer that he would use the money wisely rather than foolishly.

When it came time to pray, I asked the men if any of them wanted to join me in praying aloud. I told them “no pressure” but wanted to extend to them the opportunity. After a few seconds, this man raised his hand and said, “I’ll pray. I don’t know if I’ll remember all the requests, but I’ll do my best.” I said, “That’s okay. God already knows what they are.” At that point the man stood up to pray, and all the guys followed suit, standing in a circle. In that next moment as he stood next to me, I saw him close his eyes and open his hands palms up before the Lord as an expression of humble worship and complete surrender. He then began to pour out his heart in prayer. He prayed with brokenness, conviction, and love for every other man in that room. He remembered every single request. It was the most moving prayer that I had heard in some time. In that moment it occurred to me that this man wanted to flee from the love of money and be a man of God.

What about you? One can be in jail and free from the love of money, while another can be out of jail and trapped by the love of money and many other sins that go along with it. What do your desires, spending habits, and behavior say about you?

A man of God is known by what he *flees from*. A man of God is also known by:

What he follows after (v. 11b)

Look again at Paul’s words in verse 11: “But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.”

This verse reminds us of the practical outworking of Ephesians 2:8-10, which says that God in his grace has saved us not only *from* our sin, but also *to* the good things God prepared in advance for us to do. Some of these “good things” are listed here in the second half of 1 Timothy 6:11. These are the things that a “man of God pursues:

“Righteousness”: Not the righteousness that God imputes to us at the moment of our conversion. That’s a *positional* righteousness that God credits to us by faith. Second Corinthians 5:21 says, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” When Jesus died as an atoning sacrifice for all who would believe in him, God credited our sins to Jesus and Jesus’ righteousness to us. That’s positional righteousness. But in 1 Timothy 6:11, Paul is talking about *practical* righteousness – doing what’s right before God and others.

“Godliness”: This is the internal counterpart to righteousness. Whereas righteousness has to do with outward behavior, godliness has to do with inner attitudes and motives. We’ve already seen in our study of 1 Timothy, “godliness” is “devotion to God which results in a life that is pleasing to him.”¹

¹ Jerry Bridges, *The Practice of Godliness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1996), p. 16.

“Faith [and] love”: These are the two dominant internal virtues of the Christian life. Paul often pairs these two qualities together, and in Galatians 5:6 he sums up the essence of the Christian life as “faith working through love.” Faith is simply trusting God for everything. It’s trusting in his power, purpose, plan, provision, and promises.² John MacArthur wrote, “Faith is the atmosphere in which the man of God exists. He trusts God to keep and fulfill His Word.”³ Love is a genuine, ardent affection for God that is accompanied by an active, self-giving concern for the well-being of others. Jesus said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:37-39). The two internal virtues of faith and love are followed by two external virtues:

“Steadfastness [and] gentleness”: Steadfastness is staying power – the ability to persevere in difficult times. It’s the *true grit* of the Christian life. We do not usually associate “gentleness” with grit. The poster at the U.S. Marine Corp recruiting station doesn’t say, “We’re looking for a few gentle men.”⁴ But God is. Jesus said of himself, “I am gentle and lowly in heart” (Matt. 11:29), yet no one has ever shown more grit than Jesus did when he endured the cross for our sakes. If the Son of God displayed both steadfastness and gentleness, then a “man of God” will too. In his helpful book, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, Jerry Bridges wrote, “God has not called us to be like those around us. He has called us to be like Himself. Holiness is nothing less than conformity to the character of God.”⁵

A “man of God” will pursue holiness the way a champion pursues a prize. A “man of God” is known by what he *flees from*, what he *follows after*, and thirdly . . .

What he fights for (v. 12)

“Fight the good fight of the faith” (v. 12). If you’re going to flee from what’s bad and follow what’s good, then you had better get ready for a fight, because the secular world, your sinful flesh, and Satan himself will oppose you every step of the way.

People engage in a lot of bad fights, stupid fights, sinful fights. James talks about this in his epistle, saying, “What causes quarrels and fights among you? Don’t they come from the evil desires at war within you?” (James 4:1). Those kinds of fights characterize false teachers. Back in verse 3 Paul said they have “an unhealthy craving for controversy and quarrels....” That’s a bad fight, but the fight of faith is a good fight.

The word “fight” is a translation of the Greek term *agonizomai*, from which we get our English word “agonize.” “It was used in both military and athletic contexts to describe the concentration, discipline, conviction, and effort needed to win.”⁶ Back in the last century

² John MacArthur, Jr., *1 Timothy*. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 263.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*. Reformed Expository Commentary, NT edited by Daniel M. Doriani, series edited by Richard D. Phillips and Philip Graham Ryken (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 268.

⁵ Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2016), n.p.

⁶ MacArthur, 265.

when I played high school sports, a popular cheer that would thunder from the stands was, “You’ve got to want it to win it, and we want it bad.” How badly do you want to win over sin and pursue holiness? Enough to keep on fighting? It’s a tough fight, but a “good” fight. The Greek word for “good” (*kalos*) means “excellent” or “noble.” It’s a valiant, God-honoring struggle in which you are engaged. So, don’t give up! Keep on fighting! “The present imperative tense of the verb ... indicates the continuous nature of the battle.”⁷

We’re motivated to keep on fighting as we remember what we’re fighting for. It’s “the faith” – the body of Christian truth, the contents of the Word of God, “the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

Paul reinforces his command to “fight the good fight of the faith” by telling Timothy in verse 12, “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.” In other words, “*Get a grip on the reality of eternity, the eternal life to which God has called you!*”⁸ Timothy had responded to God’s call by making the good confession. He “confessed with his mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe[d] in his heart that God raised him from the dead” (Rom. 10:9).

Timothy made this “good confession in the presence of many witnesses.” In what context would such a confession have taken place? At Timothy’s baptism. Baptism is going public with your faith. It’s testifying to others that you are trusting in Christ alone to save you, to cleanse you of your sins, to make you right with God, and that you are committing your life to him. It’s doing so publicly before the church, “in the presence of many witnesses.”

***A man of God exemplifies
active allegiance to his King.***

Baptism is the “swearing in” ceremony of the Christian life. Have you professed your allegiance to Jesus through baptism? If not, why not? Yesterday, some people attended our baptism class in preparation for this public act of obedience. You will be witnesses of their public confession. These loyal followers of Christ will be added to our ranks.

This is a great reminder that as we “fight the good fight of faith,” we never have to fight alone. “Like a mighty army moves the church of God,” one hymn-writer asserted, and he was right. I’ll say more about this in a moment.

By making the good confession, we are not only obeying Jesus, but we are also following his example. Paul uses this truth to transition to his last point.

A “man of God” is known by what he *flees from*, what he *follows after*, what he *fights for*, and . . .

**What he is *faithful to*
(vv. 13-16)**

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

Beginning in verse 13, Paul gives Timothy a solemn charge in the presence of the two most important witnesses: “I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession....” Paul realized that confessing Christ might one day cost Timothy his life. If so, then it would be good for him to remember that “God is the one who gives life to all things.” William MacDonald wrote, “Even if men succeed in killing Timothy, yet his faith is in the One who raises the dead.”⁹

John in his Gospel records the “good confession” that Jesus made before Pontius Pilate:

Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world — to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.”

- John 18:37

By reminding Timothy of Jesus’ “good confession,” Paul is saying, “Follow your King!” In verse 14, Paul says, “keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ....” What command is Paul referring to? Is it to flee from sin? Is it to follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, and gentleness? Is it to fight the good fight of faith? Is it “all of the above”? Because Paul does not add any qualifiers to the command, it is to be applied “in the broadest sense as the entire revealed Word of God.”¹⁰ To “keep the commandment” is guard it, not only by proclaiming it but also by protecting it by what we teach and how we live. The only way that Timothy could do that – and that we can do that – is by the power of the Holy Spirit. In the opening chapter of 2 Timothy, Paul said, “Through the power of the Holy Spirit who lives within us, carefully guard the precious truth that has been entrusted to you” (1:14).

How long is Timothy to do this? How long are we to do this? “Until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 14; cf. Heb. 10:23-25). With respect to “the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ,” Paul says in 1 Tim. 6:15, “which he will display at the proper time....” The “he” refers to God the Father, since the doxology that follows refers to him – “he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen” (vv. 15b-16). The apostle John wrote,

No one has ever seen God. The one and only Son, who is himself God and is at the Father’s side — he has revealed him.

- John 1:18 CSB

That’s why in the book of Revelation, Jesus too is called “Lord of lords and King of kings.” God is sovereign. Therefore, he alone is to be worshiped. God alone has immortality – literally, “deathlessness” (*athanasia*). God is incapable of dying because he has eternal life inherently within himself. Moses prayed in Psalm 90, “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God” (v. 2). God “himself gives to all mankind life and breath and

⁹ William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary*, edited by Art Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 2102.

¹⁰ MacArthur, 266.

everything” (Acts 17:25). Scripture says, “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). At the resurrection, believers will receive a body that is immortal (1 Cor. 15:53-54), but God has immortality in himself.

He dwells in unapproachable light. This speaks of the brilliant, blinding glory that surrounds the throne of God. Man in his natural condition would be vaporized by this splendor. Only those who are accepted in the Beloved – God’s Son, Jesus Christ – can ever approach God without being destroyed.¹¹ But, praise be to God, *because* of Christ, we can “with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16).

To this glorious and gracious God belongs “honor and eternal dominion” (v. 16). It is for this reason that *a man of God exemplifies active allegiance to his King*.

***A man of God exemplifies
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Are you such a man? Are you such a woman? Do you long to be a man or woman of God? By his grace you can be. But there can be no half-hearted allegiance. Jesus said, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23 NLT). A man of God is known by what he *flees from*, what he *follows after*, what he *fights for*, and what he’s *faithful to*.

John MacArthur wrote, “Nothing motivates a man of God like a true understanding of the greatness of his God.” Paul understood that. So did Timothy. I pray that we will too.

¹¹ MacDonald, 2102.