

## **Am I a Soldier of the Cross?**

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**1 Tim. 6:11ff**

### **Introduction**

Man of God, fight the good fight. Brings to mind the soldier metaphor, 2 Tim. 2:3-4. It is as though we are in training, 1 Tim. 4:7-8, 1 Cor. 9:27-28.

### **How know a good, faithful soldier? [1 Tim 6:11-15]**

What he flees, what he runs from

What he follows, what he runs to

What he fights, what will be fight for

What he is faithful to....

How learn this? v. 15

#### **1. To persevere, a man of God flees worldliness.**

(When I say “man of God,” forgive me for not being politically correct, but I include women.) We are struck by the irony of what Paul commands Timothy: “But you, O man of God, flee!” One would expect, “But you, O man of God, stand firm,” or “fight.” Real men don’t flee, do they? Can you imagine a football coach saying, “Listen, team, the men on the other team are big and tough. When they come at you, I want you to turn tail and flee!” You don’t win by fleeing, do you?

Paul knew there are times when the way to victory is to flee, not to fight. We’re commanded to flee immorality (1 Cor. 6:18), idolatry (1 Cor. 10:14), youthful lusts (2 Tim. 2:22); here, to flee the love of money and false doctrine. James 4:7—resist the devil and he will flee from us. We need to know when to fight and when to flee.

All the commands to flee can be summed up by saying, “Flee worldliness,” what John calls “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the boastful pride of life” (1 John 2:16). The lust of the flesh refers to the strong desires to gratify ourselves by living by feelings rather than by obedience to God. The lust of the eyes refers to the desire to increase pleasure by acquiring things and outward status rather than by developing godly character. The boastful pride of life refers to self-centered living that focuses on this life in disregard of God and eternity.

Satan used these three avenues to tempt Eve. Scripture says that she “saw that the tree was good for food” (Gen. 3:6)—it would satisfy the desires of her taste (appealing to “the lust of the flesh”). Also, “it was a delight to her eyes”—it looked good outwardly (an appeal to “the lust of the eyes”). And, “the tree was desirable to make one wise”—she wouldn’t need to rely on God’s wisdom any more if she had her own (it appealed to “the boastful pride of life”). Each of these temptations is a veiled form of exalting self: the lust of the flesh, to gratify self; the lust of the eyes, to enhance self, both in one’s own eyes and in the eyes of others; and, the boastful pride of life, to increase reliance on self and decrease the need to depend totally on God. The false teachers, whose doctrine and way of life Timothy was to flee, were focused on self.

They were puffed up with pride (6:4); they didn’t submit to Scripture, but rather used it to promote their own selfish views, but without holding to its truth (6:4-5); they were into religion for personal gain, not for godliness (6:5).

When a teaching appeals to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes or the boastful pride of life, we need to take off as fast as we can in the opposite direction. To persevere in the Christian life, the man of God must flee worldliness, especially the love of money that simply furthers the love of self.

## **2. To persevere, a man of God will pursue godliness.**

We aren't just to run from worldliness, but also to run toward these six character qualities. The word "pursue" is sometimes translated persecute; it has the sense of eagerly going after something. It implies effort, diligence, and determination. In other words, you won't accidentally attain these qualities by hanging around church buildings long. You've got to go after them deliberately over the long haul.

### A. Pursue righteousness:

Here the word refers to conformity to God's Word. God declares us righteous in our standing before Him based upon the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. It is a judicial action in which God puts our sin on Christ and He credits Christ's righteousness to our account. This is called justification; as Paul explains in Romans 3-4, by faith, not by works.

But, having been justified (declared righteous) by faith, the Christian must then pursue a life of righteousness. As John states, "Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; ... By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother" (1 John 3:7-8a, 10).

Obviously, Christians sin (1 John 1:8, 10). But the pursuit of the Christian is not toward sin, but toward righteousness. During a Monday night football game, an announcer observed that the Chicago Bears' running back, Walter Payton, had accumulated over nine miles in career rushing yardage. The other announcer remarked, "Yeah, and that's with somebody knocking him down every 4.6 yards!" A Christian may get knocked down every few yards, but he gets up and keeps moving toward righteousness. It's his pursuit.

### B. Pursue godliness:

The word is closely related to righteousness. It has the nuance of reverence or awe in God's presence. A godly person lives with an awareness of God's holy presence, and so he fears God and flees from sin. 1 Tim 4:7-8 says we must discipline ourselves for godliness. One does not wake up and find that one magically attained it overnight. It is not the result of going to a spiritual conference or having some emotional experience. You have to diligently discipline yourself to pursue godliness.

### C. Pursue faith:

Some commentators understand this to mean "faithfulness," that dependability which is a fruit of the Spirit and should be present in every believer (Gal. 5:22). But it also can refer to trust in God that relies on Him in every situation of life. Hebrews 11, the great faith chapter, shows that men and women of faith believe the promises of God and live in light of them, even in the face of not receiving what is promised, because they trust that God will fulfill His sure word in heaven if not in this life.

One must pursue faith. You don't wake up some morning with vigorous faith any more than a guy with bulging muscles went to bed one night as a 98-pound weakling and woke up looking like Mr. America. How do you pursue faith? By trusting God in the frustrations, irritations, and trials that He sends your way. You deliberately humble yourself under God's sovereign hand and cast your anxieties on Him through prayer, knowing that in spite of how it may seem, He does care for you (1 Pet. 5:6-7). Rather than trusting God with the little trials, many Christians grumble and chafe under them. They flatter themselves into thinking that if a major trial ever hits, they'll trust God then. But it's the small irritations that God uses to build our faith as we submit to Him and seek Him each day. We need to pursue faith in our daily circumstances.

#### D. Pursue love:

We have the mistaken notion that love flows effortlessly. If we have to work at it, it must not be love. But why would the Bible so often command us to love one another if it didn't require effort? In our day of self-focused Christianity we're being told that we must learn to love ourselves before we can love God and others. But the Bible assumes that we all love ourselves quite well. The command to love our neighbor as ourselves is built on that premise.

#### E. Pursue perseverance:

The word is not "patience" (KJV, putting up with difficult people), but perseverance or steadfastness, which means bearing up under difficult circumstances. We pursue perseverance by enduring as we anticipate the promise of His coming and the blessings of eternity.

#### F. Pursue gentleness:

The word doesn't mean meekness in the sense of weakness. Timid Timothy wouldn't need to pursue that quality; he seemed to have plenty of it. It means strength under control. The root word was used of Alexander's horse, a mighty and powerful animal, but completely broken, responsive to its master's commands. As the next word shows, a gentle man must fight. But he doesn't fight for his own way, out of self-will, but for God's way in submission to God's will.

To persevere, the man of God must flee worldliness and pursue godliness as expressed in these six qualities: righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness.

### **3. To persevere, a man of God fights for the faith. A good soldier is known by what he fights.**

The Greek says, "the faith," meaning the Christian faith as revealed in the truth of God's Word. As we've seen, sound doctrine is essential for sound Christian living. So Satan attacks sound doctrine, often with subtle errors and truth out of balance. So the Christian must "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints."

The history of the Christian church consists of repeated battles where the enemy introduces destructive heresies, those heresies are confronted, and the truth is clarified and proclaimed. That's what Paul is doing in First Timothy. Many New Testament letters have the same purpose. The great church councils and creeds, while not carrying Scriptural authority, were attempts to correct false teaching and to set forth sound teaching. The Reformation consisted of godly men like Luther and Calvin combating the corruption and false doctrine that had permeated the Roman Catholic Church and setting forth the great truths of Scripture.

In every age, there are peace-lovers who promote unity, love, and tolerance as the chief Christian virtues. They say that we shouldn't attack false teachers or expose their errors. If you dare to say you're right and someone else is wrong, they accuse you of pride. So in the name of humility, we're supposed to tolerate every kind of error!

To persevere, we must flee worldliness; pursue godliness; and, fight the good fight of the faith.

### **4. To persevere, a man of God will take hold of eternal life. A good soldier is known by what he is faithful to.**

You may be saying, "I thought Timothy already had eternal life. Why does Paul tell him to take hold of it?" To grasp Paul's thought, we must note three aspects of the Christian experience set forth in this verse

First, God calls us to salvation or the obtaining of eternal life. Salvation never begins with man, but with God. We all were dead in our transgressions, not only unable to call on God, but hostile and opposed to God, objects of His wrath (Eph. 2:1-3; Rom 5:8). If you have eternal life, it is not because you

initiated it by calling on God, but because God, being rich in mercy, first called you and extended eternal life to you by grace (freely), according to His sovereign purpose (Eph. 2:4-10).

Second, we respond to God's call and His offer of life by faith. Faith is a heart matter, but it is expressed outwardly through a public confession and in baptism. Paul reminds Timothy that he "made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses," which may be a reference to his baptism.

Third, we take hold of the eternal life God graciously imparted to us. This is like the process of laying hold of that for which we were laid hold of by Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:12). God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 1:3), but we must take hold of those blessings, by discovering them in God's Word and by implementing them in daily life through faith.

## **Conclusion**

Mario Cuomo, governor of New York, tells of a time when he was especially discouraged during a political campaign: "I couldn't help wondering what Poppa would have said if I told him I was tired or-- God forbid--discouraged. A thousand pictures flashed through my mind, but one scene came sharply into view."

The Cuomo family had just moved into a new house, their first house with some trees. One tree, a great blue spruce, stood about 40 feet tall. But one night, less than a week after they moved in, they came home in a terrible storm to find that tree fallen, its roots pulled almost entirely from the ground. The family was dejected as they stood looking at this fallen giant. But Poppa, who stood barely five feet six, was determined. He declared, "Okay, we gonna push 'im up!"

"What are you talking about, Poppa? the roots are out of the ground!" "Shut up, we gonna push 'im up!" You couldn't say no to him, so they got a rope and stood, pushing and pulling in the rain, and eventually got that great tree back in the hole, and then propped and staked upright again. Poppa declared, "Don't worry, he's gonna grow again."

Cuomo reports that if you were to drive past that house today, you would see a straight, 65-foot blue spruce, pointing up to the heavens, with no hint that it once had its nose on the asphalt.

Maybe as a Christian, like that tree in the storm, you're fallen and discouraged. God wants you to stand upright again and to sink down roots so that you can weather the storms ahead. The roots that you need to persevere are to flee worldliness, to pursue godliness, to fight for the faith, and to take hold of the eternal life to which He has called you. Easy? No! Fleeing, pursuing, fighting, and taking hold all imply hardship and effort. But with Paul, Timothy, and many others who have gone before, God will give you strength to go the distance as you seek to obey His Word.