



1 Timothy 6:11-21

Our family has been watching the History Channel's miniseries, *The Bible*. We finished four out of ten parts. If you have seen the series you know that it is certainly not fully true to the Biblical record, but on the other hand, it is far better than most Bible-based films that come out of Hollywood. One thing you cannot avoid by watching the series is the violence. I am not sure if they place ratings on cable TV series but I would have to rate it as PG-13 because of all of the killing and blood. Again, the producers want fighting and action to draw the viewers so it's no surprise that every 5-10 minutes there is a death or a dozen deaths. You could argue that they emphasize death and fighting too much but you could also make a case that it is not emphasized enough. For example, the scene with Samson where the Bible tells us that he killed a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey, the movie only showed about ten deaths. On average, for every death they show there are probably a hundred more that Scripture tells us about.

There is blood, death and suffering throughout the Bible and we cannot apologize for this. All of it is there as a direct result of sin or as a judgment upon sin. There are plenty of descriptions of armies, battles and swords but there is also much battle *imagery*, especially in the New Testament. In four of his letters, Paul used the word "soldier" to describe a faithful Christian and even more letters contain battle and soldier imagery, such as this section of 1 Timothy 6. We sing about these kinds of battles in popular songs, like the Battle Hymn of the Republic.

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;

He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword:
His truth is marching on.

We teach our children to sing about serving in the Lord's army.

I may never march in the infantry
Ride in the cavalry
Shoot the artillery
I may never fly o'er the enemy
But I'm in the Lord's army!
Yes Sir!

The Lord wants us to take up arms and engage in a battle—but this time it is a spiritual battle fighting the unseen enemy who is usually disguised as other people or at least uses other people as his puppets and henchmen. In the real world you may be a concealed carry type or a full blown pacifist, but spiritually speaking, all believers must be “a good soldier of Christ Jesus”^{vi} constantly engaged in spiritual warfare. Faith is a fight—and it is a **good** fight; a battle worth fighting because it is for our faith in Christ Jesus. As I read 1 Timothy 6:11-21, see if you can pick out the five key words and phrases that represent this battle imagery.

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. 17 As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. 18 They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, 19 thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life. 20 O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called “knowledge,” 21 for by professing it some have swerved from the faith. Grace be with you.

Did you catch all five key words? In order they are: flee, pursue, fight, take hold of and guard. Them's fightin' words! I want to take each of these words and phrases and see how they relate to our lives and what it is we are to do. Interestingly, right in the middle of this battle language is a beautiful hymn of praise. As soon as Paul mentioned the future appearing of Christ, he could not help but to break out into a poetic exultation.

As we examine the five battle phrases, I want to link each of these to one part of this hymn in order to demonstrate that even though we are called to battle, this battle truly belongs to the Lord.

Flee

Paul wrote to his good friend, Timothy: *But as for you, O man of God, flee these things.* From what was Timothy to flee? Specifically, Paul had just warned Timothy about the deceitfulness of riches and how it has led many to fall away from the faith and be destroyed. But coming at the end of Paul's letter as it did, this was also a summary statement for the entire letter. Timothy was to flee from false teachers and false teaching. He was to flee from pride, anger drunkenness and anything else that would detract from his ability to serve as an elder and pastor to the people of Ephesus. By extension, you and I are to flee from all sin and temptations that lead to sin.

Herein lies much of our trouble as Christians—we do not flee from sin but instead, we play around the edges of sin and wonder why we always fall into it.

I talked on the phone to a mother of young children this week and when I asked if I was interrupting anything, she replied, “No, I am just trying to keep my children from breaking a window.” My first thought was that her kids were playing a game of baseball in the living room and she was standing by, baseball mitt in hand and stopping baseballs before they crashed into the window. But I am sure that is not what was happening but instead mom was, in a general sense, keeping a protective eye on her young children. She wasn't worried about windows as much as she was concerned for the safety of her kids.

Children and teens, this is why your parents have the standards that they do. Parents set standards about what movies you can watch, what music you can listen to, what kinds of clothes you wear, the places you go and the friends you hang out with, not because they are mean parents and want to take away all of our fun, but because they love you and want to keep you from all manner of harm.

The part of the hymn I want to apply to this idea of fleeing from sin is found in verse sixteen—*who dwells in unapproachable light.* This is a statement about God's holiness and perfection. Under the Old Covenant, God was truly unapproachable. Do you remember what happened when Moses to see God's glory?

But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.” 21 And the LORD said, “Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, 22 and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. 23 Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.” (Exodus 33:20-23)

In the pure light of his holiness, God is unapproachable. This is always explained in terms that God is not able to be in the presence of sin, that our sin would somehow sully his reputation but in reality, it's just the opposite. It's not that he cannot be in our presence but rather we cannot be in his presence. Like the young mother watching out for the safety of her kids, this is for our protection. To enter the holy presence of God carrying sin would mean out instant annihilation.

But that was the old covenant. Now that we are cleaned and covered by the blood of Jesus, God is approachable. The writer of Hebrews instructs us to “enter the throne of grace with confidence” (boldness) that we might receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need. It’s an interesting tension between the gracious God who welcomes our confession and the holy God who has a burning hatred for sin. Flee sin and temptation not because God will destroy us if we sin but because God has already paid the price for our sin. As Paul said in Romans chapter six: “We died to sin. How can we walk in it any longer?”

Pursue

Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.

The Christian life is not only about the removal of sinful behavior but also by the presence of godly behavior. To the world, Christians are often perceived as merely avoiding evil and not ever having any fun. My nephew, who I mentioned about a month ago in regard to the topic of gay marriage, was bashing Christians again this week on facebook.

Something that made me laugh:

"Vegan food [redacted] A food vegan meal is like a good Christian rock band... Even if its good, it still kinda [redacted]"

My nephew obviously is on an anti-Christian streak for some reason but his general perception is prevalent—Christians are goody two-shoes who want to destroy other people’s fun...and lives. There is some partial truth to this sentiment which is why we must never merely flee from sin but also actively pursue righteousness and goodness, faith and love, steadfastness and gentleness.

Through his letter, Paul ‘sang’ about the *King of kings and Lord of lords*. There is only one other place in the entire Bible where this same phrase is used. It is found in Revelation 19.

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. 12 His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. 13 He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. 14 And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. 15 From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords. (Revelation 19:11-16)

The battle described here is not mere imagery or metaphor. This is the appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ and the final judgment upon the world. So my point is that as you pursue these virtues you are also pursuing Christ. It’s not enough to run away from sin. Anyone can do that. Anyone of any religion or worldview can make a decision to live a moral lifestyle, but for the believer, as we flee from sin we also must pursue Christ with abandon. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He demands our allegiance and more importantly he deserves our allegiance.

Fight

Fight the good fight of the faith.

The imagery of the first two words—flee and pursue—naturally lead to the next word: fight.

1. It is a good fight. Anytime you battle for your faith, it is a good fight. Early in our marriage we were friends with a couple named Carl and Michelle. I was in seminary and Carl was a bit of an intellectual reading books more intense than many of my seminary studies. They seemed quite happy in their marriage until one day Michelle confided in us that Carl was not coming home at night after work. A few months later we were told that he was contemplating divorce. I met Carl for breakfast and he told me that he wasn't sure if it required more courage to leave the marriage or stay in the marriage. You can guess what I told him. Fight for your marriage! Real courage would mean fighting with every breath to save your marriage and I knew the fight would not be impossible because his wife was willing to join the fight as well. Sadly, he had already made up his mind before we met together and they were divorced a few months later.
2. It is not a battle against flesh and blood. *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places* (Ephesians 6:12).

Now that sounds like a fight, doesn't it? Rulers, authorities and cosmic powers. We know that life is difficult and that the government, society, the marketplace and schools do not generally have our best interest in mind and often want to harm our faith. We see and feel all of these forces against our faith, pressing in and crushing us. But we forget that for every force fighting against our faith that we can see, there are a hundred that we can't see. The invisible armies of darkness devote every moment of their existence to our destruction.

My favorite battle scene from a movie comes at the end of *The Return of the King*. Aragorn and his army knows they are marching into certain death. Aragorn gives a nice speech to rally the troops while riding on horseback. In my opinion, it's a good battle speech but not a great one. The best part is when the good guys are completely surrounded by the armies of Mordor. Now moments from his final battle, Aragorn walks a few steps forward, turns and says two words to his troops—"for Frodo"—and then runs full stride into battle. It's my favorite battle scene because they are fighting for the honor and memory of the brave little Hobbit named Frodo.

Now picture the worldwide "spiritual forces of evil" who are continually rallying their own troops intent on our destruction. We really are clueless to the invisible war that rages around us.

3. But the good news is that the battle has already been won. Here is where I want to apply the part from the hymn where Paul wrote: *he who is the blessed and only Sovereign*. There is no question that the imagery of fighting and battle is real and relevant. This is what is necessary but the only reason we fight is because we are guaranteed the final victory. God is the only Sovereign. His plan of redemption has been in place from before the foundation of the world. We may lose some battles but the war has already been won.

People don't usually enter battles expecting to lose but no one ever enters a battle with a guaranteed victory.

Take hold of

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.

This phrase is kind of like enjoying the spoils of war. As believers, our spoils of war are not gold doubloons and faraway lands but we take hold of eternal life.

Though we have not yet entered eternal life we can take hold of it and claim it as ours. We can do this because God is the one *who alone has immortality*. Years ago I heard Christian author and philosopher, Peter Kreeft, say something intriguing at a conference. He said that we are more like turtles than we are like God because God is eternal and we are not. I never quite agreed with his statement because turtles do not have the image of God within them like we do. We are eternal in that we will live forever but we were created at a point in time. But God inherently possesses immortality. It is his very essence. Immortality was not given to him it was always his. God alone possesses immortality and he gives eternal life to all who trust in Christ alone for salvation.

R.C. Sproul once said in a conference, "I emphatically deny that God exists. In fact if he did exist, I would not believe in him." He was describing the difference between existence and being. Classically defined, existence is what you and I experience which includes constant change. We are getting older. We are—hopefully—getting wiser and more mature but the fact is, for better or for worse, we are on a state of constant change. But God is unchanging. The theological word is immutable. That is why Sproul said that if God changed, he could not believe in him. If God changed it would mean that he is either moving to a state which is better or worse than his present state of existence. Obviously, if God is getting worse, I would not want to believe in a God like that but neither would you want to believe in a God who is experiencing positive change—who is improving and getting better—because that would mean that he is not yet perfect. Even if such a God never sinned, it would mean that in some way, he was limited.

But we know that God is not limited in any way. He alone possesses immortality and for that reason, you and I can lay hold of eternal life. By his word, God has guaranteed it for all who trust in him.

Guard

guard the deposit entrusted to you

This is a final word to pastor Timothy to be on guard against the false teachers that were decimating his flock.

I practiced a little censorship this past week. Someone brought a book in the library to my attention and wondered if it was an author that the church would endorse. Although the book was basically a harmless book, neither was it helpful. Also, the author has changed since he wrote the book and I would not recommend anything he writes. So I pulled the book for the library shelf. Aren't I mean?! As a church, we need to guard the deposit entrusted to us and part of that

includes having the best resources in our church library. This doesn't mean that I am going to come to your house and censor books on your bookshelf (but maybe you will want to count the books before I come and after I leave!). Some people are able to "eat the fish and spit out the bones." Some can discern the good from the harmful but many cannot effectively do this.



Furthermore, you could make a case that books are far more dangerous than guns. If the government had to regulate one or the other, I would much rather prefer they register books (though both are reprehensible!). I think that Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species* and Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto* are the two most dangerous books ever written. And they go hand in hand with one another. Darwinism pushed Communism forward in a powerful manner. For example, the only piece of artwork that Vladimir Lenin had in his office was a bronze statue of a monkey contemplating a human skull. The monkey is sitting top of a pile of books the prominent one being Darwin. (Incidentally, this one sits in the UW Stevens Point library.) If humans are just a step above monkeys then Lenin could

justify sending tens of millions of them to their death.

The part of Paul's hymn that applies here is verse thirteen. *Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession.* Facing crucifixion, Jesus did not waver in the slightest Pilate.

As Ryan ponders his first year at UWL, Karen I have some concern about the constant liberal agenda that he will face. Using this verse we could ask, will Ryan be able to make the good confession before his own Pontius Pilates? He is fairly confident in his ability to defend against evolution. I would have to agree that he is light years ahead of where I was at his age. So the question all parents must ask is this: are you making spiritual deposit into the life of your kids/ Are you teaching them to guard the good deposit that has been entrusted to you and them?

Rich Maurer
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ⁱ 2 Timothy 2:3