

1Tim 24-06-30b

We are inspired to continue now our study here in First Timothy chapter six and it really is important, it really does make a difference. We are practical people, we have practical problems, we have responsibilities, we've got situations, we've got relationships, we've got people to take care of, places to go, people to see, things to do, and it's really important for us to remember the source of our strength. It reminds one of what God said to Israel, remember the rock from which you were hewn and the pit from which you were digged, your origins, your source, where did you come from? As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, our source of life and vitality is our connection to him.

And we connect to him not through a visible presence, we don't have the Lord Jesus speaking to us through the overhead coming through the ceiling, our connection to him is through the word and the spirit. When he says, I am the vine, you are the branches, abide in me, that connection is the word of God. It is the wholesome pattern of words, of doctrine, of faith.

That is our connection. It doesn't come any other way. You can't do the works and get back to the connection.

You can't do the works and somehow derive the truth from doing good things. And honestly, and amazingly, there are people today who are pushing the idea that, well, don't spend so much time doing the Bible, get out and be with people and help them and be supportive and feed the orphans and clothe the widows and push for social action and beneficial change and acceptance and toleration and welcome everyone into the big tent of Christianity. And that this is somehow going to build strong souls.

This is going to draw us closer to God. This is going to make us better Christians and we will be somehow wholesome and fit for every good work by going out and doing good works. And this is like saying, I'm not going to eat any food.

I'm going to become strong, healthy, vital, useful, and fit by spending my time on the exercise bench. I'm going to run. I'm going to bicycle.

I'm going to lift. I'm going to do isometrics. I'm going to do all of these things and I never eat a meal.

And somehow that is going to build strong bodies, 12 ways. It just isn't going to happen. We have to start with nutrition.

We have to start with the foundations, start with being built up by the word that gives us strength and endurance and smarts, knowing what God would have us do and what he would not. And many times there is not a rule that applies. And it is the spiritual instinct we have from the presence of the Holy Spirit and long time spent in the word.

That's why this is so emphasized and why Paul tells Timothy and through him, all pastors, I charge you, preach, exhort, repeat, emphasize, drive this point home. It is the word that counts. A lot of people can get the word and do nothing with it.

This is your parable of the soils, but without it, you can do nothing. Jesus said, without me, you can do nothing. He comes to us through the word by means of the spirit.

And in no other way, he doesn't come to us through good works. He doesn't come to us in emotions or visions. It is only what we are doing here.

So we've seen these three wholesome areas, wholesome words. That's what we take in. Wholesome doctrine, that is the pattern that should emerge in our lives when we pay attention to those words and wholesome faith.

This is the outworking and the visible expression of the first two. All of it needs to be wholesome. If anyone doesn't consent, we saw this last time, he is going to be obsessed with disputes and arguments over words.

It isn't fruitful after one or two exchanges. You can quickly tell whether it is fruitful to continue a discussion. If someone is seeking, if they're interested, if they're listening to and considering what you had to say from your understanding of the word of God, or if all they're doing is waiting for you to finish your sentence so they can jump in and counter punch.

I'm going to refute that. I've got a great verse that puts that in its grave and nails the coffin shut. And they want to debate and dispute and win some kind of victory.

And from this comes envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions. Then verse five says, useless wranglings. And really, I did quite a study on this phrase, the upshot being it is constant friction.

You're just wearing and generating heat and not light. It's just constant friction. Men of corrupt minds, destitute of the truth.

What we've just seen is the opposite of that, isn't it? When you think about wholesome words, wholesome doctrine, wholesome faith, that is the exact opposite of having a corrupt mind and completely lacking the truth. You look around in politics today, in some cases on both sides of the political divide in our country, and there are extreme people who are blind to the facts. Generally, there are points that can be made on both sides that are valid.

There are shortcomings, whether it's people or policies on both sides. And we want to reject what is evil and hold fast to what is good. And you have to try to figure out, I love that line from Russell Crowe's seafaring movie where they're getting bugs out of their bread and racing them on the table.

And some kind of way he works his way around to the one that lost is the lesser of two weevils. And that's what we end up doing when we have to make political choices. And what are we going to support? What are we going to do? Many times there's no really solid, 100%, 24 karat good answer.

And it's the lesser of two weevils that we choose. But people will heap up to themselves teachers rather than teaching. And this is a source of the problem because these people are men of corrupt minds, destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is gain, a means of gain, that they're going to get their definition of gain.

And this is where the fact that words mean things counts. Godliness is a means of gain. Well, what do you mean by gain? What is gain? For us, godliness with contentment is great gain.

And in Philippians chapter four, verse 11, I'm not speaking in regard to need for I have learned in whatever state I am to be content. My contentment doesn't rest on my circumstances, whatever state I am in. It doesn't mean that we don't have concerns or that we don't need to take action or that we don't have to avoid danger or endeavor to support and protect ourselves.

We're not laissez-faire. We're not lackadaisical. We're not indifferent.

But we find this idea of contentment. Whatever state I am in, I find myself to be content. I know how to be abased and I know how to abound.

Different skills. When we abound, we have to figure out why am I abounding? Why has God placed these resources or these opportunities within my grasp, under my stewardship? How can I be a good steward of this bounty, whether it's circumstantial or material or in the realm of potential and opportunity? There are things that are within my power now. I'm abounding.

How can I abound as unto the Lord? Other times, we are hard-pressed. We're beset on every side. We're under a heavy burden.

And it's not always one that we can see a short-term resolution of. And we are abased. We're low.

But Paul says, I have learned in whatever state I am to be content. Godliness with contentment. Great gain.

But notice he says, I have learned. Does he learn by experience and trial and error? Or does he learn by looking at the wholesome words, the wholesome doctrines, pursuing and practicing a wholesome faith and seeing the application in dire straits and in comfort and security? Paul has been in palaces and he's been in prisons. He's been free on the road and he's been shipwrecked.

But he has learned from the word of God through the Lord Jesus Christ entrusted to him to be content, not be worried, not be unsettled, not be knocked off his stride. Content. I can do all three things through Christ who strengthens me.

Christ strengthens me. How does Christ strengthen Paul in these circumstances? There is comfort and encouragement of the scriptures. And through faith, we have hope.

Hope in the glory of God. Same thing you will find in 2 Corinthians 9, verse 8, a few pages further back. 2 Corinthians beginning in verse 6, he who sows sparingly will reap sparingly.

He who sows bountifully will reap bountifully. Let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you.

What a wonderful affirmation. God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you always having all sufficiency in all things. It doesn't get much more comprehensive than that.

You have always all sufficiency in all things may have an abundance for every good work. Always having all sufficiency in all things. You have an abundance for what? For every good work.

Godliness with contentment, pattern of good works. These things all are woven together. And in verse 8 of our chapter 6, 1 Timothy, having food and clothing with these, we shall be content.

Those who desire to be rich, if you start becoming acquisitive, you pin your security on your bank account or your savings or your 401k or your 403b, you fall into temptation and a snare. Many foolish and harmful desires, which drown men in destruction and perdition. Isn't something that when you desire a great quantity, you wind up drowning in it.

You can't drown, I don't think, in a teaspoon full of water. Half inch of water on the ground is pretty tough to drown. You drown when you've got a surplus and an excess of water.

And it is as though this desire for quantity is that in which we end up drowning in destruction and loss. In seeking to gain, you suffer perdition. It is that counterintuitive idea that the more acquisitive we become in the material realm, the more likely we are to suffer complete and total loss.

And in the course of having so much water, we drown in it. The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their acquisitiveness. And you can want to acquire all kinds of things beyond just money.

Pierce themselves through with many puncture wounds. But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue. So there are seven exhortations for Timothy that are personal.

And there are three exhortations that are outward looking. And it's a wonderful sort of collection of seven plus three, making 10, which is the number of completion in the human realm. You've got 10 fingers, 10 toes, 10 commandments, and so on.

So what are these? We saw the first one back in verse 21 of chapter five. Observe these things. That is number one.

First Timothy 5, 21. Observe. This is in the sense you observe the law, meaning you follow it, you obey it, you implement it.

You're guided by it. You function within it. Observe.

That's number one. Verse 22, in your interactions with others, don't be hasty, keep yourself pure. So you start by looking at these things, these exhortations and words of the Lord Jesus passed along by the apostle.

Those words give us the framework, the standards, the knowledge to keep ourselves pure. Now that I know right from wrong by the law comes the knowledge of sin. We have the knowledge of what is good coming from these things.

So in the light of that, keep yourself pure. That's number two. Number three is here in verse 11.

You, O man of God, flee these things. There's two collections of these things. There's good and beneficial, doctrinal, faithful, these things.

And there is the substitute, the ante. If you've got Christ and antichrist, you have doctrine and you have anti-doctrine. You have faith and anti-faith.

So we observe one and we flee from the other. Now, if you're going to flee from it, what does that mean? What does fleeing a thing inevitably result in? Separation. Separation.

If you see people that are invested in the world, if you're in contact with people who suppose that prosperity and self-sufficiency in the material realm is the goal and the objective and is the measure of a life, if they're measuring by worldly standards, success, achievement, accomplishment, security, and so on, it doesn't say don't throw in with them, don't fellowship with them. It says flee these things because a little leaven leavens the whole lump. Contact with it is infectious.

Flee these things. That is number three. Number four is also in verse 11.

Pursue. You flee these bad things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and gentleness. That is number four.

Number five is in verse 12. Fight the good fight of faith. And this tells us that it isn't going to be easy.

We don't stroll away from the bad things and saunter rather aimlessly into the things. Fleeing and pursuing are energetic. You're doing fight or flight and we are fleeing and we are fighting here.

Flee the bad and fight the good fight of faith. This is number five. Fight the good fight of faith.

So it's going to be a struggle. Number six, lay hold, grab onto, seize, hug, don't let go of, eternal life. It was interesting.

I got a short note from a buddy of mine I went to high school with this past week and there is an apocryphal story about a professor in a classroom. There's a whole class of these. They've got a name for this group of stories where there's a somewhat self-confident professor who's an atheist and there's a student in the class who is going to speak up for faith and belief in God.

But in this one, the atheist professor says, there's no such thing as God. And the student says, well, is there such a thing as darkness? And in connection with this, I should say that he also says, you know, this idea of evil. Evil is a construct.

It's not a real thing. And the student says, well, is darkness a real thing? And the professor says, of course, you see darkness every night. You shut all the doors and windows.

There's darkness. It's a real thing. And the student points out, well, darkness isn't an existence.

It is the lack of light. When you subtract light, darkness is the result. Light is a positive and a presence, but there's no such thing as darkness.

He says, what about cold? Is cold a real thing? And the professor says, of course, there's all kinds of examples of coldness. And the student says, no, coldness is the absence of heat. You go down to minus 413 Kelvin or whatever it is, and you reach absolute zero.

That is the ultimate in cold, and it is the ultimate absence of heat. And in the same way, the student goes on to argue that evil is the absence of God and the absence of God's goodness. And then it closes by saying, the student was Albert Einstein.

It's a complete fiction. It wasn't Einstein. But there is the idea that in the absence of good, evil is the inevitable condition.

There's really no such thing as neutrality. To the extent that God and God's goodness and righteousness are not in a thing, the condition is more and more evil. They are

inextricably linked.

Evil is the absence of God's presence and goodness. And I responded by saying, I have often thought in the same terms about death. Death is the absence of God's life.

You have to be connected to God's life, not only for salvation, but also on a daily basis. The more of eternal life, the more of God's life permeates our thinking, our talking, and our acting, our behavior, that's laying hold of and keeping hold of eternal life. And to the extent that we ignore or depart from or diminish the presence and the effect of God's life, to that extent, there is death.

It's one or the other. They are on a spectrum. You look at your gas gauge, you've got an F on one side and an E on the other, full and empty.

And as that needle descends and moves toward E, that is the absence of gasoline. And the only way to move the needle is to supply more gasoline. To lay hold on eternal life, by definition, inextricably, it's a law of physics, like light and darkness, like hot and cold, laying hold of God's life diminishes death and the effects of death in our souls, in our lives.

And ultimately, when we are taken to glory by the Lord Jesus and enter fully into that life, there is no more night, there is no more death, there is no more darkness. Old things are passed away. All things are become new.

The Lamb is the light. And that's why there is no night in the New Jerusalem, because the Lamb is there and He is light. And where the light exists, there can be no darkness.

Where God's life exists, there can be no death. Has really far-reaching implications when you think about it. This is why it's so important for us to pursue life.

Okay, I'm with you. I agree. That sounds good.

How do I lay hold on eternal life? I thought Timothy already placed his faith in Christ. His gift of pastor has been recognized by the testimony of many witnesses and so on. He made the good confession.

So if he's already got eternal life, why does Paul say lay hold on it? This is the daily observance, the daily pursuit, the daily experience of God's life. How does it come? Well, the life of God comes into our lives in the same way and as a part of the power of God coming into our lives. And you know how that happens.

Cultivating the influence, the presence, the guiding light of the Holy Spirit, and the word of God. The word of God, the doctrine, the faith, you can't have it without the propositional truths that come from God's word. The doctrinal movement of the past, the so-called doctrinal churches, ICE teaching and pastors that did this.

You can see where there have been failures. There have been problems. Churches have split.

They've dissolved. Pastors have fallen. You know, the grass withers and the flower fades.

What is it that persists? What is it that the doctrinal movement got right? The word of God, alive and powerful. All scripture, God breathes. That is, in fact, the core.

But you will notice people that assent to that, people that consent to it, people that agree with it, that affirm it, that will recite those verses because they heard them at the beginning of every Bible class. You look at history and the scattered remnants of churches that espoused and believed that, and where are they now? Many of them have disappeared, or they exist in a greatly diminished and ineffective form today. Why? I would submit that with all of the emphasis on sound words, sound doctrine, and sound faith, you can't rely on intake and exposure to arrive where God wants us to be.

It is not enough to listen. It is not enough to take notes. It is not enough to be able to repeat and regurgitate truths in the power of the Holy Spirit with constant prayer, constant resort.

You can't go far astray if you are daily pounding on the door and being allowed entrance into God's throne room by prayer. If you are cultivating and seeking, not just, I'm in fellowship because I confessed my sins. If I'm in fellowship, what should be happening? I can't just say, oh, I said an angry word there.

Oh, Lord, I said an angry word. I've confessed my sin. I know you've forgiven me.

Now I'm in fellowship. And then I go on about my merry way. What is fellowship? Just go up two verses from 1 John 1.9 to 1.7. If we keep on walking, these are durative present tenses.

If we keep on walking in the light as He, God, keeps on being in the light, we keep on having fellowship each with the other. And the blood of Jesus Christ, God's son, keeps on cleansing us. Pursue.

Keep yourself pure. Pursue righteousness. Pursue godliness.

Pursue faith. Pursue love. So many of the mechanical confession people rebound and keep moving.

Some of them called it. It's a wonderful concept, but you can't have it in isolation. It's not a magic formula.

It's not the prayer of Jabez. It's not the Bible code of some kind. Well, all I got to do is rattle off a list of my sins and I'm a healthy Christian.

Downfall, destruction of so many by being superficial and indifferent to the exhortations here. There are 10 of them. Observe these things.

Keep yourself pure. Flee what is bad. Pursue what is good.

Fight a fight of faith. Sort of toss off a confession people are not fighting a fight of faith. If I'm fighting the fight, I don't want to be overcome by spiritual dark forces.

I don't want to be a part of their agenda. I don't want to be wandering around instead of aiming my weapon down range and getting the job done. Fight the good fight.

Lay hold of eternal life. Grab a hold of it and hang on to it. The product of life.

And that means go to God in prayer because we are alive. Remember the prodigal story. When he comes back, the father says, why shouldn't I celebrate? This son of mine was dead and now he's alive.

He wasn't actually physically dead, but the relationship was dead. The communication was dead. He's alive because he has returned and is in genuine productive fellowship with the father.

The father can express his love. The son can express his love. They can do things together.

They can move the purpose and the mission forward together. That's life. My son that was away busy doing his own thing was dead.

He's alive. This my son. He's alive.

Lay hold on that life. Exploit and cultivate and enjoy. And instead of drowning in perdition, drown in the love of the father.

Be surrounded by it. Be buoyed up by it. You really can't drown.

You're going to be buoyed heavenward through it. But we've got to be paying attention. We can't just get so distracted with, oh, look at the time.

I've got to be somewhere. I've got to do something. Oh, look at the state of things.

I've got to fix. This got to be picked up and cleaned and fixed. And I've got this to do and that to do and the other to do.

Occupation with the horizontal inevitably diminishes and deteriorates our proper occupation with the vertical. And we can't let life distract us from eternal life. We are living a life and God has left us here on purpose.

But this life is secondary to eternal life. All of it. When I finish here in about two minutes,

make a list of everything that you think is important that needs to be done today or tomorrow.

And I mean, legitimately important. I got to go to work. I've got to feed some animals.

I've got to do this. I've got to do that. These are legitimate things.

Make a list as long as you want. And then look at that list and say, are any of these more important than eternal life? Can I do these things without losing my hold on my eternal life? Life that is defined by my fellowship with the father through Christ, by means of the word and the spirit. In that same way, that chain of custody of the word comes down from God, the father, from the throne room, through the Lord Jesus, to the apostle, to scripture, to us.

That is the conduit of life. And we should be responding through that very same chain, through the word of the Holy spirit, via prayer, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ coming into the throne room. That is the exhortation here.

So lay hold. The seventh is in verse 14. Keep this commandment without spot blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing.

Keep this commandment and don't just keep it a little bit. Don't just keep it, but it really needs some attention. It needs a wash.

Keep it without spot, no omission, no corruption, no deflection, no spot. Isn't it a wonderful promise that the Lord Jesus is going to present to himself a glorious church without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish? Our keeping, our attention, our focus as believers in the Lord Jesus. And you ask yourself, how many Christians in the world today, anywhere, are actually doing this? Actually even looking at it and recognizing that this is our calling.

This is why we're here. We are getting our next heartbeat and drawing our next breath because God wants us here doing this. This.

How many people have got this figured out? How many people are responding and doing it? And believe me, there are 7,000 that haven't bowed the knee to bail. But I'm concerned about us. Are we doing this or are we letting ourselves be too much in this world? And well, I'm living, you know, I watch the news and so on.

Keep this commandment without spot. So those are the seven commands. If you list them out in order, 521, observe.

522, keep yourself pure. 611, flee bad things. Verse 11, pursue good things.

Fight the good fight. Lay hold of eternal life. Keep the commandment without spot.

Those are the seven that are personal for each one of us. Now for Timothy, what is his job? The next three are for him. In verse 17, command these things.

And those who are rich in this present age, don't get distracted. Don't get proud. Don't let the material world throw you off your stride.

If you're abounding, you need to know how to abound. Verse 20, oh Timothy, guard what is committed to your trust. Guard it.

Don't lose it. Don't forget it. Don't wake up tomorrow morning and we're back in the old rut, back in the old harness, back in the old grind.

Guard. Pay attention. And finally, avoid stories.

Avoid fables. Avoid earthly profane. You know, there's the profane and the divine.

The holy and the profane. Profane means it's all about what's going on in the world. What about the election? What about the policies? What about taxes? What about this? What about that? What about the economy? What about grocery bills and fuel bills and whatnot? Profane babblings, avoid them.

Avoid contradictions coming from what is falsely called knowledge. This so-called knowledge, avoid it. We flee, we avoid that which is profane and earthly.

We pursue, we grasp, and we hold on to that which is good. This is the only reason we're here. Of all of the billions of human beings that God has ever given life on this planet, in the distant dark historical past, down through the centuries, this is our time.

This is the one shot. We've got less than 100 years total of this life to figure out what God wants and do it. To be the few, the humble Christians.

Not the few, the proud, the Marines, although that's a great thing, but the few, the humble, those who lay hold on eternal life. That's our privilege. That's our opportunity.

And that is Paul's fervent, heartfelt, pleading exhortation in all three of these past early epistles, as well as his other letters. Figure it out and go for the gusto. Remember that? It's a beer commercial, but I think of it more often in terms of my spiritual life.

You only go around once in life, so why not grab for the gusto? Let's be different. Let's go full bore to represent the Lord Jesus, be pleasing in his sight, and be presented before his Father on that great and glorious day when this life is over and the next life begins. Father, thank you for the truth of your word.

Thank you for how clearly and powerfully our purpose is revealed and the means by which we can accomplish it. We pray that the Holy Spirit will impress it on our hearts. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.