

1 Timothy 6:11-16

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[0 : 0 0] Fight or flight? I wonder what's your poison in the face of danger or threat. Do you flee or do you fight? And there'll be people here who know a lot more about what that means and what it speaks of who we are as people and how we respond to circumstances. But you'll have heard of the expression fight or flight. In Paul's charge to Timothy, he recommends both, that we both flee and that we fight. I want to spend just a little time this evening considering this charge that is directed to Timothy by Paul as he comes to the close of the letter, as he draws the letter to a conclusion. Of course, when we see the title that is given to this section, Paul's charge to Timothy, it is important to be clear on what it is we're looking at. We're looking at words of challenge, words of charge to the believer, in this case, who is being addressed to Timothy. So, a charge isn't something that you study or explore or examine to maybe, I don't know, satisfy some curiosity as to what he says and why he says it and what it means. But a charge is something that we are to receive and respond to. And so, my encouragement to you this evening is that you would receive this charge for yourself. And one of the first things we'll be looking at is, or establishing, is that it is indeed a charge that we can legitimately consider as being directed to each of us. And I hope that I persuade you of that, and as I do, then that you will do what you ought to do. And as I say, receive it as a challenge to you this evening. What we're going to do is we're going to think of, first of all, about to whom the charge is directed. I've hinted at that just a moment ago. So, that's the first thing we'll do. Then we'll have a little time thinking about the content of the charge. What is it that

Timothy is charged to do? And there's quite a lot in that, even in the few verses that we're going to be looking at. And then finally, we'll just notice what I'm calling the seriousness of the charge.

And when we get to that point, hopefully it will become clear what I mean by that, and how we can establish that this is no light matter, no fleeting thing, but a serious matter that is being considered, or the nature of the charge is a very serious one. First of all, then, the one to whom the charge is directed. In some ways, that's a very easy question to address, or, you know, it's very easy to identify who is being charged, because the letter is directed very clearly to Timothy. And so, in the first instance, when Paul wrote this letter, his concern was to challenge Timothy. These words, were, you know, composed with Timothy in mind. When Paul writes them, he's thinking about Timothy, he knows Timothy, he's conscious of his circumstances, and so he's saying, Timothy, this is what I want you to do. And I think that is very clear. In the first instance, the words, the charge is directed to

Timothy. And I suppose at that point, we might say, well, we're off the hook. We can study it, we can explore it, and think, oh, isn't it interesting what Paul charged Timothy to do?

But it's nothing to do with me. You know, he's not speaking to me. I don't have to respond to the charge that we find in these verses. But I don't think we can come to that conclusion.

[4:11] Notice, first of all, the manner in which Paul addresses Timothy at this point in the letter. There at the very beginning of the section, in verse 11, we read, but you, man of God. And then he continues, flee from all this, and so on and so forth. But first, just noticing the manner in which he addresses Timothy, but you, man of God. Just think a little bit about this designation that is given to Timothy by Paul, man of God. Think, first of all, about the background to the language that Paul employs. This term, man of God, is a term that we find with some regularity in the Old Testament. And it is the case that in the Old Testament, it was generally used of those who had been called to a particular, let's call it, life-encompassing ministry in God's service. So prophets, for example, would sometimes be spoken of as men of God, or a particular prophet as a man of God. Moses is described in this way as a man of God, or indeed the man of God.

And we're not going to be looking up lots of passages to confirm these things because I think we're familiar with it. But let me just notice one occasion when we have this language used in the Old Testament. So in Deuteronomy chapter 33, and at the very beginning of the chapter, we read, this is the blessing that Moses, the man of God, pronounced on the Israelites before his death. So here we have Moses, one who was called to this life-encompassing ministry of service to God, and he is spoken of, described as the man of God, or a man of God. And of course, that was true of Timothy. Timothy was a young man who had been called to, let's use the expression, full-time Christian service, though we may be a little bit uncomfortable with it because it implies there's any other kind of service. But I think you know what I mean when I use the expression. Now again, on this basis, some of us might think, well, I'm off the hook. That's not me. I'm a Christian.

I'm called to serve God, but I'm not a Moses. I'm not a Timothy. That's not who I am. That's not what I'm involved in. But let's move on and just notice another thing about this designation, not only the background in terms of how it is used elsewhere, but also notice how it is applicable to all of us as believers. I think there's a couple of things we can say. Regardless of its use or its principle use or normal use in the Old Testament, the reality is that we are all, as believers, men and women of God. That is who we are. And regardless of whether we are designated as that, explicitly, that's who we are. If we are Christians, if we are trusting in God, then we are men of God or women of God. That's simply who we are. So you are a man of God or you are a woman of God if you are a believer. In addition to that, we know that believers in the gospel age are explicitly granted a priestly status that calls all to, let's call it full-time service. You know, one of the truths that was rediscovered at the time of the Reformation, and it's important to stress, not discovered but rediscovered, was the principle of the priesthood of all believers, that every believer was a priest in the New Testament age. All of us are, in that very particular way, men and women of God. And so, when we read this charge directed to Timothy, and of course, in some regards, very much with Timothy in mind, I think we can and ought to legitimately take it as a charge that is directed also to us, as men and women of God. It's also interesting to note, maybe just very fleetingly, the context of its use in this letter, at this moment in the letter. Notice how Paul addresses Timothy here. He says, but you, man of God. That start to the sentence, but you, makes it clear that Paul is contrasting

Timothy with others. Now, we haven't been going through the letter, so we're maybe not immediately familiar with, well, who are the others that he is contrasting Timothy with. But if we were to read through the letter, we would find that Paul had been warning Timothy about false teachers. And here he is contrasting Timothy with them. He's saying, they're not men and women of God, but you are. You are a man of God, and so you ought to live in this way. You ought to behave in this way, because you are not like them.

And so this contrast is being drawn with the false teachers, with those who are not true believers. And I think that sentiment is one that is also relevant for us. The charge that we have here is directed to each of us, in contrast to others who are not who we are. There is this personal direct challenge to us. We are to live as believers, not on the basis of how others live. The bar is not the behavior of others, but the bar is the bar that God sets for each of us. And that principle is one that holds today. I wonder if it's true, maybe for all of us, be it consciously or often these things are subconscious, that we set the bar as to our behavior, our conduct as believers on the basis of others.

[10:14] So we don't want to be, you know, maybe a little bit better than them or him or her, or maybe not quite so bad as that person or this person. And we think that that's the standard that is required of us. But that's not the case. It's God who directs to each of us the challenge, as we will consider it now in a moment. So in summary, this charge is directed to you. Let's now think just very briefly about the content of the charge. And what we can do is we can focus on the four verbs that Paul employs as he charges Timothy. They are the verbs to flee, to pursue, to fight, and to take hold. I began with a question, fight or flight. What is your response in circumstances of perceived danger or attack?

Well, in the case of Paul's charge, the curious detail, as I mentioned before, is that we are called to do both? First of all, in the order in which Paul places them in the letter, I don't think there's necessarily a particular significance about the order, but we'll just look at them in the order that we find them. The first one is the call to flee. Verse 11, but you, man of God, flee from all this. Flee from all this. Now, immediately that generates a little bit of a difficulty because we don't know what all this is. And clearly here Paul is making reference to something he's already mentioned. Timothy's read the whole letter. He knows what he's just mentioned. We haven't. So what is the all this? What has gone before in the letter that Paul is referring to?

Well, I think particularly Paul is referring to the sinful behavior of the false teachers. And the false teacher's behavior was marked by greed. They were looking to enrich themselves. It was marked by self-indulgence. They were using religion as a means of indulging their own appetites, their own sinful appetites. Their behavior was marked by deception. They would be looking to deceive the believers. It was marked by pretense. They were claiming to be something that they were not. They were presenting themselves as holy and pious when they were anything but these things. And what Paul says to Timothy is you have to flee from all that kind of stuff. You have to flee from sin. You have to flee from deceit. You have to flee from pretense. You have to flee from self-indulgence and greed. These things are not to mark you. You're a man of God. And you have to flee from these things. And the language is very, what can we say, very vigorous. You know, it's not simply that you have to be, have a distaste for them or maybe just try and avoid them where possible. No, you have to flee from them. You have to run away from them. Whenever you notice that you're being drawn in or tempted in any of these ways, then you have to turn around and run away in the opposite direction. You need to flee from these things. So that's the first thing in terms of the content of the charge. But then secondly, there is the call to pursue. So on the one hand, you have to run away. But then on the other hand, you're called to run forward, as it were, to pursue. And what is it you are to pursue? Well, flee from all this and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness.

I think it's very clear that Paul is deliberately kind of making a play of this idea of fleeing in one direction and pursuing in the other direction in the Greek that the two verbs sit side by side.

So roughly, if we were to try and capture that in a translation, then it's something along the lines of, from all of this flee, pursue righteousness, godliness, and so on and so forth. The two verbs right next to each other, flee from this and pursue this. Well, what is it that we are to pursue?

[14 : 22] Well, Paul here lists, again, I don't think in any particular order, or I don't think there's any logic in the order in which he mentions these Christian virtues or traits, but he mentions a number that he is encouraging or challenging Timothy to pursue. What are they? Let's just really note them. I don't want to, you know, detain myself thinking about each one in any detail. Time doesn't allow for that. But first of all, he says, pursue righteousness. Righteousness, I think, in this context is a reference to that which is morally right, that which is pleasing to God. If we were to use, you know, language that we use, I think sometimes in different contexts, we would say, you're to do the right thing, and where God is the arbiter of what is right. So not what is right for you.

That's a popular phrase nowadays, isn't it? You've got to do what's right for you. Seems a very, you know, deep piece of advice. It's what's right for you. That's what you need to do. Follow your heart. Do what's right for you. And Paul says, no, that's nonsense. You're not going to do what's right for you. You have to do what is right, period. And who decides? God decides. Where does he tell us in the Bible? And so we turn to God's Word, and there we have established by God what is right and what is wrong, and we have to do what is right. We pursue righteousness. We pursue doing that which is right. We are to pursue godliness. I think here the word godliness relates more to what we might call our interior piety, our reverence for God, that in a very real way inspires our thirst for righteousness. Our desire to do what is right will be directly proportional to our reverence for God.

The more we respect God, the more we are committed to God, the more we will want to do what is right in His sight. And so the two kind of go together. If we had to think of a logical order, maybe godliness would be the foundation that would have as its outflow righteousness. What else? Pursue faith.

This, I think, is about our trust in God in every circumstance. Timothy was facing opposition and people who were making his life very difficult, and it was important for him in those circumstances to be trusting in God and in God's help. Pursue love and attitude to others expressed in words and actions.

Pursue endurance, the desire and the disposition to continue in the face of opposition and discouragement. I don't know how things are going in your life. I don't know if you are experiencing discouragements just generally in life or maybe in Christian service, and there's a temptation to maybe say, well, I'll just, I think I'll just leave this. I'll just, I'll throw in the towel. I'll take a wee break.

[17 : 18] You know, it's just too much for the moment, and you're tempted to give up or to hold back. Well, here there is this charge directed to us, a charge to endurance, to perseverance, in and especially in the face of opposition and difficulty and discouragement.

And pursue also, what's the final one he has there? Pursue gentleness. Again, I wonder if in the case of Paul writing to Timothy, he has particularly in mind the way Timothy is to relate to these people who are opposing him. You know, these are enemies of the gospel.

They're false teachers, and yet even with them, there is a call to be firm, firm in his own convictions, but in his dealings with them, to demonstrate gentleness. And not only with them, of course, but in all of his interpersonal relationships, that they would be marked by gentleness. When we're harsh in the manner in which we speak, maybe we're saying the right thing.

We're taking the, maybe the high moral ground. We're saying the right thing. We're challenging. We're rebuking. And there's a place for all of these things. But if we do so in a harsh manner, what often happens is we simply alienate people rather than winning them over. And so there is this call to pursue gentleness. And then even the verb itself, we haven't really thought about what it implies. But this verb, pursue, implies energy, implies resolve. I wonder if we pursue these things.

We look at these things and we say, yeah, these are all important, and it's good to be characterized by them. But do we deliberately and proactively pursue them? Because that's what we're being called to do, to flee sin, to flee self-indulgence and greed, and to pursue all of the things that Paul mentions there. It's interesting that this combination of fleeing and pursuing is one that Paul employs again in his next letter to Timothy. In Timothy chapter 2 and in verse 22, we read this, flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace. And he goes on. So flee evil desires of youth. Pursue, righteousness, faith, love, and peace. So we have flee, we have pursue. The third verb that we have is to fight. And it's in this expression, fight the good fight of the faith, there at the beginning of verse 12. Fight the good fight of faith. When we think, well, what's he referring to here? Is he referring to something different to what he's already talked about in pursuing and pursuing and fleeing? And I don't think Paul is thinking about something completely different. In a sense, we could understand it as being that the manner in which we fight the good fight is by fleeing from sin and by pursuing righteousness, godliness, gentleness, love, and so on and so forth. That's the way we fight the good fight of faith. That said, the language of fighting the good fight perhaps does add something to our understanding of the charge. The language itself implies or makes clear that in this Christian life we are confronting real enemies. And the language of fighting is a reminder to that. You know, we are fighting those who would oppose us, spiritual enemies who would stand in our way, and we are to fight them with resolve. The language also lays stress on the strenuous effort involved in responding seriously to the charge. A charge like this cannot be responded to half-heartedly. You know, the call to fight the good fight implies vigor and energy and decision.

[21 : 15] And it also makes clear that this is an enduring challenge. The tense of the verb here is what's sometimes spoken of as a continuous presence. So the idea is to keep on fighting. Every day there will be this call or there's this need to fight the good fight of faith. And it is fought in faith. It is the good fight of faith. It is fought by faith as we trust in and look to God for strength and wisdom.

And then the final verb that we have as we look at the content of the charge is take hold. Take hold of the eternal life. There we have it in verse 12. Verse 12. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. Eternal life, a new dimension of spiritual life, is ours as a present possession when we trust in Jesus. And yet, though that is true, Paul here speaks of the need to take hold of it. And we might say, well, how does that work?

If we already have it, how could we take hold of it? Well, I think when he uses this language of taking hold of it, it's in the sense of living out that eternal life to the full. It's almost like an inheritance that we've received, but sometimes we don't make use of it. It's ours, but we don't use it.

We don't live it. And so Paul says, take hold of it. Take hold of it. Live life to the full. That is what you are called to do. And maybe we could say more about that, but we'll leave that for another occasion. Let's just close briefly with the final aspect here. We've thought about to whom the call is directed, and I hope made clear that it's directed to all of us as men and women of God.

We've thought a little bit about the content of the charge, but then finally, the seriousness of the charge. And I think that's evident as we note three features of the charge. In verse 13 and following, we read, 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.

[23 : 30] So all those things that he's been telling Peter to do, to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. And the seriousness of the charge is evident as we notice these three features of it. First of all, the witnesses that are called to be witnesses to the charge. It's a very solemn thing that Paul is doing. He's saying, I charge you to do this, to flee, to fight, to pursue, to take hold. And who are the witnesses who are present, hearing the charge, hearing that I'm delivering the charge, and hearing that you are receiving the charge? Who are the witnesses? Who will be able to vouch for the fact that this charge was made? Well, none other than God the Father, who is witness to this charge, and God the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. They are the witnesses to this charge. And that alone gives to the charge a real solemnity and seriousness.

We might be a little bit intrigued. Why does the reference to Jesus then lead on to a detail being given of what Jesus did while he was standing or testifying before Pontius Pilate? And what's that got to do with anything? I think maybe what Paul is doing here is giving Jesus, yes, a witness of this, but also an encouragement. Be like him. Be like him. When he was challenged, notice what he did, how he was faithful in confessing or in making this good confession. Well, you do the same. You be like him. The seriousness then of the charge is evidenced by the witnesses that Paul identifies, but also the manner in which it is to be kept. I charge you to keep this command without spot or blame. You know, take this seriously. Don't do this like half-heartedly. Without spot or blame, you are to respond to this charge that I am making to you. And then finally, the final aspect that speaks of the seriousness of the matter is the period for which it applies. And what do we read there in verse 14? To keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus

Christ. So this isn't a passing thing. This is not some charge that Paul is saying to Timothy, well, maybe for the next month or so, I want you to focus on these things and then I'll get back in touch and we'll maybe mention one or two other things once you've finished this, once you've sorted this. No, this is something that is going to carry on right until Jesus returns. So throughout your life, every day of your life, this is applicable. And that, of course, also highlights the seriousness of it. It's not a fleeting thing. It's not a passing thing. This is a life mission responding to the charge that is directed, as I say, in the first instance to Timothy, but by extension to each and every one of us. So we have this charge, a charge directed to us, to men and women of God, a charge that calls us, that urges us to flee from sin, to pursue righteousness, a call that urges us to fight the good fight by faith and to take hold of eternal life, to live our life, the life that we've been given to the full and to God's glory. And this is no insignificant matter, no matter that we can put to one side and say, well, I'll think about that later. No, this is a serious matter. God himself is a witness to the charge being delivered. We are to conduct ourselves and respond to it and fulfill the commission without spot or blame, and we are to do so as a lifelong mission for us. Well, may God help us respond and take seriously the charge directed to us. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word. We thank you for the apostle Paul. We thank you for the wonderful way in which you drew him to yourself, from being a persecutor of believers to being a faithful and effective and blessed apostle. We thank you for his great love for those to whom he writes, the great love that he bore to Timothy, a love that found expression in being demanding of Timothy, in charging him in this very solemn way, that he might conduct himself in a manner worthy of his calling. And we do thank you that we can take this charge that was directed to Timothy and receive it for ourselves. And we pray that we would do so, and that each of us would carefully and seriously consider how we might better respond to the call that is made to us in the different areas that we've thought about and identified in these verses. Help us then, we pray, and we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.