

TAKE HOLD OF THE ETERNAL LIFE

1 Timothy 6:1-21

Key Verse: 6:12

"Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses."

In chapter 5 we learned that we must respect older men as our father and all kinds of young men as our brothers and women as our sisters. When Paul said, "brothers," it meant brothers in Jesus Christ, bought by the blood of Jesus and brothers in his eternal kingdom of heaven. Chapter 5 tells the future direction to former communists as well as to capitalists, who are lonely and living in false security. In chapter 6 mainly we learn who the false teachers are

and who the true servants of God are.

I. False teachers' character (1-10)

First, the relationship between master and slave (1-2). In Paul's time, the slave problem was more serious than at any other time in history. In Rome there were 60,000,000 slaves. The number of slaves was roughly 10 times more than the number of Roman citizens. In order to control slaves who were striving to survive or run away day and night, the Roman government made a very strict rule. If ever there was a slave who ran away from his master and was caught, he was either executed or branded on the forehead with the letter "F." I don't know exactly what it means. Maybe he was an "F" student or a *fugitivus*, which meant runaway. But in the Christian community, slaves were considered as brothers. There was a danger that the slaves would use the new relationship as an excuse for producing inefficient work and then expecting to escape all punishment. There was a danger that a slave would use the fact of his own and his master's Christianity to be a lazy and indifferent servant who

was exempt from discipline and punishment. Look at verse 1. "All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered." In this verse Paul admonishes slaves to consider their masters worthy of full respect. Paul said this because slaves find it hard to respect their masters because of their slave mentality. Slaves must respect their masters by faith so that they can show that they are brothers through a new relationship. When they do so, Bible teaching may not be slandered. Let's read verse 1 once more. "All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered." In verse 2 Paul urges that a slave whose master is a Christian must work harder so that his master can get more benefit because his master is a beloved brother in Christ Jesus. Let's read verse 2. "Those who have believing masters are not to show less respect for them because they are brothers. Instead, they are to serve them even better, because those who benefit from their service are believers,

and dear to them. These are the things you are to teach and urge on them." Slaves should not show less respect for their masters because they are brothers. They are to serve them even better, because those who benefit from their service are believers and it is the sign of their spiritual progress.

Second, false teachers (3-5). Look at verses 3-4a. "If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing." As I said before, the circumstances of life in the ancient world produced false teachers with an opportunity which they were not slow to take. As an annoyance to Christians, the church was full of wandering prophets. The Christian service was much more informal than it is now. Anyone who felt he had a message was free to give it. The door was wide open to men who were out to propagate what they had. There was a great problem of the times. The cause of the problem was sophists. In ancient times many were looking for fun. The only

fun was sophists' speech. One of the most famous sophists was Adrian. Once he came to Rome and news spread that he was to speak. Then the whole population flocked to the Athenaeum to hear him. As a result, the Senate and the Circus were emptied. Sophistry to ancient people was comparable to football to American people. There were many sophists who competed with one another. One sophist had to compete with a new sophist who was getting popular. The old sophist was very sick. But he went out to compete before the audience. After speaking he died of exhaustion. The Greeks were intoxicated by the spoken word. Among the Greeks, if a man could speak well, his fortune was made. In history there was always some entertainment to the ordinary people. To the ancient people sophistry was very popular entertainment to ordinary people. To modern Americans, football is very popular entertainment. There was a young man who received a huge inheritance from his father. He memorized all the names of popular football stars. In the football season, he traveled around all the states where football was being played. He

stayed in a hotel and went to enjoy football games. Every year he enjoyed all the national football games. He enjoyed national football games in his lifetime for 40 years. So his village people respected him for his great enthusiasm for football.

From time to time, because of football games, Sunday worship services were greatly hindered. Sophists were like a kind of athlete. They entertained people with many lies so as to make much money. They entertained people with many imaginary stories for their popularity. One boxer said, "I fight this fighting to make some money." The other boxer said, "I want recognition, money doesn't matter." These two boxers well expressed their purpose. The first one was fighting for the sake of money. The second one was fighting for the sake of his popularity.

These sophists did not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus

Christ and to godly teaching. These sophists knew how to be big mouths but they were men of self-conceit and men of no understanding. Their sophistry was for the sake of unhealthy interest in controversies. As a result, their sophistry brought forth quarrels, envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between men of corrupt mind who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain (4,5).

Third, love of money is a root of all kinds of evil (6-10). Look at verse 6. "But godliness with contentment is great gain." Paul says godliness with contentment is great gain. As we studied, godliness is to hold to one promise of God in our hearts. When we have one promise of God in our hearts we can rejoice in our souls. But fallen men want to grab something in their hands. Fallen men have no satisfaction even if they have 70 houses. But when we have one word of God in our hearts, we are happy. Especially when we know the Bible teachings in our hearts, we know how to win the victory living in

this world. "For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that" (7,8) But lovers of money worry about money all their lifetime and die with empty hands (9).

A woman worked in a tobacco company for 20 years and saved all her pay. But after World War II Korea was liberated from Japan. The woman who had saved money was so attached to the money that she forgot to exchange her cash savings into new currency. After six months she learned that the money she had earned for the last 20 years turned out to be worthless pieces of paper. One young man had a very poor father. So he decided to be a rich man. He studied hard and became a vice president of a national bank. At the age of 53 he retired. He received a huge pension. But he fell into anxiety. He went around to buy good housing lots. He became tired and got a stroke. So he had to use all his money to restore his health. As soon as he spent all the money he

had saved for 40 years, he died. One young man was a high-ranking intelligence officer. He made a great deal of money while he was in his position. His youngest daughter fell down and got a stroke and he had to use all his money. But he was saved from his misery by reading Job. Job 1:21 says, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised." He talked too much about naked hand and now everybody calls him "naked hand." Following this, one winter he fell down and broke his tailbone. After that people called him "tailbone." Paul did not say that money is evil, but, "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." The love of money hinders many people from having faith in God. We must know that we brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing we will be content with that. That's a Christian's view of money (7-8).

II. Fight the good fight of the faith (11-21)

First, pursue righteousness (11). Look at verse 11. "But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness." When we read verse 11 very carefully, we learn that Paul encourages us to grow in the image of Jesus. First, we must pursue righteousness. Righteousness is Jesus (Ro 1:17). "Pursue righteousness" means we must follow Jesus' lifestyle. A man who watched Jesus carefully was moved and wanted to follow him as his disciple. But Jesus said, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (Lk 9:58). This verse tells us that Jesus lived, not with material things, but with the promises of God. When Jesus began his earthly messianic ministry, his ministry was too small to conquer the world. Seemingly, his ministry was terminated by his crucifixion. But Jesus believed that after his resurrection his disciples would spread to the whole world and preach the gospel; thus God's will for world salvation would be fulfilled. Jesus believed the promises of God. We must also have one promise of God in our hearts so

that we may not be one of the miserable people.

Second, fight the good fight of the faith (12). What does it mean to fight the good fight of the faith? It is to take hold of eternal life (12a). Fallen man is eager to feed his physical body. Fallen man believes that his physical body will live permanently. One boxer wore white trunks with the word "Everlasting" written on them. He was very popular. He defeated his opponent who had the record of 30 fights, 30 wins by way of knockout. He was so charming and patient. He defeated such a terrible opponent by way of knockout in the seventh round. He fought the good fight of boxing. But one day he was enjoying driving with his two sons. Suddenly the car jerked and crashed. His two sons were safe. But he died with a broken neck. People of the world exert effort and strive and struggle to survive like boxers. But we Christians live believing in the promises of God. Paul said, "Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called." He was saying to live by the promises of God. When

Christians believed in the promises of God they made a confession of faith in the presence of many witnesses. Paul encourages Timothy to keep his pledge made before many witnesses. Paul admonished him to hold on to eternal life in the sight of God who gave life to every man, and who gave Jesus Christ. Paul urges him to take hold of eternal life without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which God will bring about in his own time (14,15a). Here we learn that to take hold of eternal life or to keep the promise of God concerning eternal life is not easy. It is spiritual fighting.

Paul, while writing this letter, was so moved when he thought about God's promises and their value that he began to praise God, saying, "...God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen." (15b,16) When we hold on to eternal life through his promises we come to know that Jesus is King of kings

and Lord of lords who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light.

Third, command them to do good (17-19). In this part, Paul instructs Timothy to use money generously and be willing to share. Look at verse 17. "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment." As we always experience, when we have some money it is difficult to remember God. But we must master ourselves to remember God when we have much money. Let's read verses 18-19. "Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life." Here we learn that when we have the promise of God in our hearts we are free to share anything generously with our fellow

Christians.

In this passage we learn that every generation has had entertainment which draws all people of the world. In Paul's time, it was sophistry; in modern American time, football games. But it is foolish to spend all our time and money for entertainment. We must take hold of eternal life, which is the blessing from our only Ruler, King of kings, Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and lives in unapproachable light.