

But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. ⁹ People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

¹¹ But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. 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. ¹³ 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 ¹⁴ to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ 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. (1 Timothy 6:6-16)

Fight the Good Fight of Faith

What are you willing to fight for? The other day, I was driving somewhere and a song from the 1980's came on the radio: "You've got to fight for your right to party." I hope that when the Beastly Boys sang that, they were being at least a little tongue in cheek. So what would you be willing to fight for? Most of us would probably fight to protect our families. But are there causes that we would fight for? Are we willing to fight for our country? Many of us here today have put on a uniform and said that we would. Some of us even did. Would we be willing to fight for freedom? For democracy? For equal rights? We often use "fighting" in a metaphorical sense. We send congressmen to Washington to fight for things we believe in. We don't really expect them to slug it out on the floor of the House of Representatives. But we do expect them to stand up and oppose laws that we believe are bad for our country. That is a fight. There are lots of other ways that people fight. There are lots of causes that people fight for. Are they all equally worthwhile? Obviously not. This morning, St. Paul tells us Christians, **Fight the good fight of faith!**

I.

Does that seem like a strange thing to tell you to do in church – especially in a church whose name is *Peace Lutheran Church*? Well, that is exactly what God says! **Fight the good fight of faith. Resist the love of money.**

Paul begins by saying, **"But godliness with contentment is great gain."** That's what we're fighting for. "Godliness" really means living for God. It means taking seriously all that he calls us to do and be because we know our Savior. If we do it right, it comes with contentment. So the picture here is not the grim faced Puritan who bans dancing and card playing and anything else that might be fun. Rather, the picture is the person who lives the life God calls us to because he is content. In other words, he trusts in God. He knows that his Father in heaven loves him with an everlasting love and he will give him every good gift. So he knows that he has only the best today – even if other people seem to have so much more. He understands that if God didn't give him something today, then today, that something would be bad for him. He understands what St. Paul meant when he said, **"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."** God gives us all we need. The real danger to our souls is thinking we need more than what he gives us.

Godliness – living for God – with contentment – with peace in your soul because you know the love of God – is indeed a tremendous gain. In my ministry, one of my greatest blessings has been visiting people at challenging times in their lives. Some of those people have been just amazing. There was a man in prison that I used to visit. He was 34 years into a life sentence, and yet, when I would go to see him, by the time I left, he was building me up to trust in God and to live for him. Did he want to get out of prison? Sure! But every day that he was there, he trusted in God and found contentment. He died in prison, but all the time he was there, he was really free because he knew he was going home to heaven. He knew that God loved him, even there.

Can you see the gain God offers us? What would be its opposite? Paul tells us that, too. He says, **“People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”** That is the opposite: the love of money. Now, notice, Paul did not say, “Money is the root of all evil.” That simply isn’t true. Money is neither good nor bad. It’s just there. What we do with it is good or bad. Our attitude toward it is good or bad. I can give a rich offering to church in the hopes that God will use it to spread the gospel and that many people will be saved. Is that money evil? No. But when I live for money, when my whole life is about how much stuff I can accumulate, when all my waking hours are consumed by an endless pursuit of wealth, then I have fallen into a trap of the devil. My very faith in Christ is in danger.

Why? Because money has become my god. Your god is the thing that is most important to you. It’s the thing that you trust in to take care of you when times are evil. Money easily takes that position in our lives, especially when we start thinking, “If I only had this much more, then I’d be happy.” You never really get there! But it takes other forms, too. The parent who never spends time with his family, let alone time in church, because he or she is always working. That person could be guilty of the love of money. Or the person who can’t sleep at night because all they do is worry about money. Or the person whose whole life is about pleasure – the coolest vacations, the greatest parties, the most exciting activities, the newest toys – that person, too, could be living for money. How? Because of what we use money for. That person is all about their standard of living. The same could be said for the person who never stops pouring money and time into his house. In all those cases and in so many more, money or what we buy with money is our god.

People who love money plunge themselves into a temptation. The devil loves it when all we can think about is money. He loves to make us greedy and selfish. He loves to tell us that the church doesn’t deserve any more of our hard earned money. He loves to make money into our god. And some Christians fall into that trap. Paul says that they wander from the faith and they pierce themselves with many griefs. Even unbelievers can tell you that living for money gives you no joy here. You may lose every person that matters to you in your life if money is what you are all about. But even worse, if you wander from your faith, you will spend eternity in hell. And you will have no one to blame but yourself.

The love of money is the exact opposite of godliness with contentment. In the end, it will condemn us to an eternity of being locked out of heaven, looking in, wishing that we could share in God’s love and the joy of eternal life. Are we in danger of that fate? Are we guilty of this sin? Only you can speak for your own heart and mind. But we live in a very materialistic society. We live in a generation that believes that every kid needs to have an ipod and a smart phone and the fifty or sixty dollar a month data plan that goes with it. We live in an age that tells us constantly that we need bigger houses and newer cars and more current clothes. And the only way to get all that stuff is to have more money. Do you feel the heat of that temptation? Does it rob you of your joy? Does it keep you from church and chop off your faith at the knees? Does it lead you to lie and cheat and bully and fight for what you want instead of serving God and your neighbor? Are you in danger of wandering away?

The devil would love nothing better. But he’s not the only person involved in the battle for our souls. Christ is deeply concerned about us and our eternal life. So concerned, in fact, that he came into this world to live the life of joy and contentment that God calls us to live. He was perfectly godly in all that he did. He did all that in our place. It counts for us. And he died for all the ways that we make money too important. He died because our sinful nature keeps trying to wander away from God and into an eternal hell of griefs. He died and he paid for all that sin and then he rose and declared that it is gone forever. God has erased it from our record.

Now, every time we hear that, the Holy Spirit reaches into our hearts and leads us to fight the good fight of faith. He leads us to wage war against the greedy and selfish desires of our hearts. And make no mistake about it, my friends: it is a war. It is a knockdown, drag out, take no prisoners battle for our soul. Only one side can win. But we have the power of Christ on our side. With his power, we can win. Commit yourself today to a new attitude toward money. Commit yourself today to wage war against greed and envy and selfishness in your own soul. Commit yourself to hearing God’s promises that he gives you all you need and strive to be content. If you have food and clothing, God is with you. None of the rest of it matters. Nothing that we can possibly have in this life will last past the grave. So fight the good fight of faith.

II.

What are you willing to fight for? Clearly, the love of money is not the life God wants us to lead. But it's easy to say what not to do. What are we supposed to do? Paul tells us that, too. **Fight the good fight of faith. Take hold of eternal life**

Paul says, **“But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.”** Can you imagine an attitude that is farther away from the love of money than this one? Righteousness, godliness, love and gentleness just are not the attributes we associate with a hard driving successful businessman. All these things come from faith. They are examples of true, self-sacrificing love. No one who loves money can love other people enough to sacrifice for them.

Paul continues, **“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.”** To fight the good fight of faith is to take hold of eternal life. What does that mean? It does not mean coming to faith. Paul is talking to people who already believe. Rather, he's talking about embracing our salvation. He's talking about wrapping ourselves up completely in Jesus and his work. Of course, that begins with trust. We trust in Christ to take all our sins away. We trust in Christ to love us and that makes us content. We trust in Jesus and we commit our lives to this thankless life of service that God calls us to. We know that he will make it all worth it in heaven.

We're not taking hold of this life. We're seizing the promise of eternal life and using that to change everything about this life. Everything that we do down here is just preparation for when we get to go there. Yes, for most of us, that probably means years of preparation. But is that really so unusual? If you went to college, how many years were you willing to study in hopes of someday working in a specific area? If you have children, how many years do you put in to teaching them and caring for them before they grow up and you get to see them grown up and living lives of faith and service? Many of the most important blessings of our lives take time to get to us. Eternal life is the greatest of all blessings. While we are here, we seize it – we wrap our minds and our hearts and our lives in the promises of what is coming. And we wage war against everything that goes against that life that Christ has given us.

Like Timothy, all of us who are confirmed have made the good confession of faith in front of many witnesses. Like Timothy we have committed ourselves to God who loves and sent his Son to die for us. We have committed ourselves to Christ who could easily have gotten out of dying, but who boldly confessed who he was to Pilate and went to the cross for us. We have committed ourselves to the Holy Spirit who works through the gospel in the word and the sacraments to build us up. We have committed ourselves to God, who lives in unapproachable light. His glory is beyond the mind and heart of sinful man. But that glory is real. And in Christ, it is ours. That glory is what we are fighting for. Take hold of the eternal life God has given you and fight, here and now and for the rest of your life. Fight against all that lives in you and wars against your faith. Fight against sin and unbelief. And cling to Christ to win the victory for you and bring you home to eternal life. Amen.