1 Timothy 6:12 Fight the good fight of faith. Take hold of eternal life, to which you were called and about which you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

I like the way that this section starts out. Here is the Apostle Paul writing to his fellow co-worker and Pastor, the young Timothy, giving him advice and guidance for not only his ministry but also for the faith and ministry of the souls that he served. I can tell you that this advice is timeless. What I mean by that is that this advice is still needed and still valuable for today’s Christians and what they face. We are simply going to jump in right away and look at what this text tells us and we are going to use as our theme that very simple but important encouragement of our text: **FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT.**

So what is the first piece of advice that we could say addresses this issue of **“fighting the good fight of the faith?”** Verse 6: **But godliness with contentment is great gain.** Simple words. Words actually used in the context of warning against false teachers who want to use their “spiritual wisdom” as a means of financial gain. That is their only purpose. They really don’t care about souls or the importance of what souls are. They are people in religion for personal gain: for wealth and for fame, which they hope will bring more wealth. So following hard on this warning against false teachers and their ungodly bent for financial gain are our words. **“Godliness with contentment is great gain.”**

What are we to learn in these words? I think we are to learn trust in God. The secret behind being content is to know that God is acting and moving in your life for your spiritual and eternal good. If God wants to bless you with money, God knows you can handle it and use it for his glory. If God wants to bless you with little money and financial struggles, well, grasp that God is doing that for your personal good and salvation. Trusting God is the secret to contentment. To be happy no matter what the circumstances, to be joyful with little or much, to be thankful for struggle or ease, yes, to be thankful that God so loves you that he is right there doing what is best for you. That’s the type of “godliness” that counts. And recognize that it is only “godliness” when you grasp that everything is of and from God. If you think it is fate that is fatefulness. If think it is luck that is luckiness and so on and so forth. Godliness is involved with the grasp, the marvel and the wonder of God.

Why we want to trust God is a marvel unto itself, but I like the very down to earth reminder of a truth we don’t necessarily like to comprehend. That’s verse 7: **“For we brought nothing into the world, and we certainly cannot take anything out.”** Hard truth. I don’t know when and I don’t know how but someday, one day each and every one of us is going to die, to physically stop functioning in this world. Fact is, you didn’t come with anything and you are not leaving with anything. To me, that truth puts a viewpoint on just about everything, all the stuff and things around us. Stuff is of the world. We only get to borrow it. Nothing physical is really all that important. Cars? Guns? Fancy clothes? That blue hair? Those torn apart jeans that you paid eighty bucks for? House? Do you get the point? Nothing in this physical world is going with you to the next world. Stuff is just not important! The only thing of great importance is our spiritual treasure. The treasure of your heart you will take that with you, whatever treasure you have, but stuff, it stays behind to rot or be sold at some auction to whomever for pennies on the dollar.

Then comes verse 8. Verse 8 gives that balance that is also so precious in God’s Word. Verse 8 says, **“But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be satisfied.”** Food and clothing, these two things are the very base necessities. No food, you will die of malnutrition, although if we are honest most of us will have to say that dying of starvation is going to take us a long time. Clothing, again in a sinful world, that clothing is needed for life. It protects you from the elements and helps to stave off the harshness of nature. I am not sure we get that anymore because basically most of our clothing is ornamental. Go back in history to times when what you had on, was the difference between life and death. Yet notice that God says, if you have these basics, be satisfied with that.

Then comes verse 9-10, again verses with a strong concern. They say, **“Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and many more foolish and harmful desires, which plunge them into complete destruction and utter ruin. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evils. By striving for money, some have wandered away from the faith and have pierced themselves with many pains.”** Again these are tough words. But I take comfort in the fact that these words are written some 2,000 years ago. It just reminds me that what we struggle with, people back then, actually in all of time, have struggled with.

Ah yes, the destruction of the pursuit or need of money, that love for money. The awful things people will do and have done for money is sad. Think of some of the categories you know of: prostitution, exotic dancing, drug-dealing, and so on. So many illegal or ungodly ways of making money. A couple of these I just could never fathom. The drug dealer sells a substance that will addict and then destroy people and their lives. He still sells it. Or the abortion doctor or the parent who because they are not financially ready for a child or another child, gets that abortion. I can’t grasp the darkness and evil of such lives and living. That love of money has indeed destroyed so many lives in so many ways. No wonder we are directly and pointedly warned. Don’t make money your heart and core. But I do think it is more than just money, it is the idea of the pursuit of wealth in any form. Don’t make things and getting them or keeping them or hoarding them your life.

Do you see how all of these things keep pushing us back to **“godliness with contentment?”**

Then comes our next section. This next section clearly addresses Timothy in his life as a servant, a minister of God, but don’t forget this life of Timothy is also the standard for the life of every Christian. Verse 11 rolls into this section this way, **“But you, O man of God, flee from these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness.”** There it is. There is the calling of every single person who is or who claims to be a follower of God. We flee from evil. We pursue, we chase after, make our goal, strive for, and hunt the good and right things. And these good and right things are not ours to determine, but rather is what God determines to be good and right.

The list is fun to think of. **“Righteousness:”** You must be righteous; good, holy and pure before God. We cannot get righteousness on our own but can find righteousness only in and from God, specifically from Jesus and his redemptive act of forgiving our sins. **“Godliness.”** I briefly spoke of that before. Can’t be Godly unless the true God is involved. I think this word is the one that drives us all the more into the Word of God. We can’t know God without the word, the written Word of God. When you decide that what you think, feel, hear, imagine or conceive has more weight and power than the actual written Word of God, you are not being godly. **“Faith.”** This is total trust in God. God says it and that settles it. Please, don’t give me the old, “But there are so many ways to interpret the Bible!” No there are not. Faith and what it is, is made clear and concise in God’s Word and it is about God’s plan of salvation in Jesus. **“Love.”** Just look at and study God and you will learn more about love than you ever learn sitting in the back of a car making out! God is love. Learn love from God. **“Perseverance.”** This is the idea of steadfast and patient endurance. For many of us, our problem is we lack this. We run around telling ourselves, “I can’t take this” and that’s the way it is. This word tells you to act differently because of God and his strength in your life. And finally there is **“gentleness.”** Gentleness is just what it says. Very much in the mode of kindness, compassion and a love for those you deal with.

Seriously, here is the standard that God wants for his Christian children. Makes you wonder why the world is so opposed to the message of Jesus and his wonderful path of truth! Yes, it is because the world really doesn’t grasp or get the message, the true message of Jesus.

Here comes verse 12, **“Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of eternal life, to which you were called and about which you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.”** There it is. It is a command. While it is true that faith is a gift of God because of our sinful nature and our inclined to evil souls, having and keeping faith is a pretty good fight. We need to stay in the Word of God, or better yet, we need to make sure that the means of grace, the Gospel in Word and sacrament is a part, a regular part of our lives. God tells us the Holy Spirit is the one who calls, gathers, and keeps us in the one true faith. The Holy Spirit works through the gospel in Word and sacrament. I can guarantee that your faith will be in direct proportion to your use of the means of grace. It is all too easy to let that means slip from our lives. Going to church is about that fight. It is here that you get that regular dose of the means of grace. Here that you are led to the wonder of Jesus and his saving love.

I know, we like to say, “You don’t have to go to church to be saved!” I always respond, “Yes, that is true, you don’t have to go. But if you claim to be a Christian, why don’t you want to go?” The illustration I like is the apple tree. God has taken you, a dead stick and made you into a vibrant, beautiful apple tree. Apple trees bear apples because that what they are! You mean you would be an apple tree and declare, “I don’t want to bear apples. Apples are a waste of time. Besides, all apples want is your sap!” Such dead fruit trees are cut down!

Did you note the part about confession? That is no doubt a reference to a few things in Timothy’s life. To his baptism, where he showed a trust in God and his promise that this simple act would mark him as God’s child. I think it refers to Timothy’s public declaration of faith in Jesus, something today we call “confirmation.” At that moment Timothy would have confessed his faith in Jesus, the atonement, the resurrection, the Holy Spirit, the Word and all the things that the Apostles’ of Jesus proclaimed and got written down for us too. And finally, I think this confession refers to Timothy’s oath of office for the ministry. To stay faithful and true to Jesus and the Word. To work for the salvation of souls.

I point all of this out because I don’t want you to take your confessions lightly. Baptized? Think of what that washing with water declares and says. And be warned, if you think baptism declares your obedience to God instead of God’s grace for you, you are missing something! Are you confirmed? You took an oath to be faithful and true to Jesus! The oath I have been giving for 40 years has a couple of clauses that say, “I would rather die, than fall away from Jesus and the truths of Jesus found in our Evangelical Lutheran Church.” Are you still holding to that? Almost every Sunday we have a confession of faith and we use either the Apostles’ or Nicene Creeds. We confess in summary, the whole of the Christian faith. Are we just muttering words or do we really mean what we confess? Confession is important in our faith lives. Confession keeps reminding us what our faith is and why. Timothy is reminded to make the good confession especially before others.

After all of this Paul breaks into a doxology, words of praise and honor to God alone. Beautiful words. They say, “**I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who made a good confession as a witness before Pontius Pilate, that you keep this command without spot and without fault, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will make known at the proper time—the blessed and only ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or is able to see. To him be honor and power forever! Amen.**

There is so much in here to marvel at. We can talk of the very essence of God who is behind and in all life there is. We can speak of Jesus, who also made a good confession before Pilate. (Yes, Jesus affirmed he was God, before Pilate!). Keep this fight of the faith is the charge. Keep this fight going until Jesus returns, and he will. He will when the time is right. And then just fathom those words of praise for the very nature and majesty of God. I marvel at the words that say **“no one has seen or is able to see…God.”**

Jesus lived in this world and people saw him and that is true. But, the full power, majesty and glory of what God is, is way beyond us! We know the marvel of God because of Jesus who revealed him to us, but just let it sink in that the totality of the marvel of God, the Triune God no has, nor can see. This is our God! Majesty, power and wonder galore! And all revealed and given to us in Jesus and his atoning work. Why wouldn’t you want faith? Amen.