

Christ, then Christlikeness

Littlebourne - 27th April 2025 - 1 Timothy 6:11-16

Last time in Timothy, we saw Paul tell Timothy what not to be like - to not be like the false teachers, to not be obsessed with false teaching or with material gain. This week, almost at the end, we see what Timothy *is* to be like, in contrast. Not seeking controversy or argument, not seeking godliness as a means to material gain, but seeking real godliness.

v11

11 But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.

The list in verse 11 is to contrast the previous paragraph that described the false teachers. They were not really men of God, as was evidenced by what they sought out and by the fruit of what they taught and did - disunity and friction.

But Timothy is described as a man of God, and should thus do things differently - in fact he should *flee* from the sorts of things that the false teachers are doing. He is instead to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness and gentleness.

There's no standing still - there's no neutrality. Everything we do, every desire we have, is drawing us in a particular direction. We sometimes like to think that whilst we might not be getting much better, we at least are avoiding getting worse. We trick ourselves into thinking that we can morally stand still, and not slide backwards whilst we do it. We're so often complacent.

Psalm 119:9-10:

*9 How can a young man keep his way pure?
By guarding it according to your word.
10 With my whole heart I seek you;
let me not wander from your commandments!*

The alternative to pursuing God is to wander off elsewhere. Our choice is between actively pursuing God, or pursuing something else entirely.

v12

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

Paul tells Timothy that this is a fight. We don't become more godly merely by avoiding the things of the world, only by the fleeing. The pursuing is important also, the fighting courageously for what is good. This fighting is something of a given - with faith comes the fight.

But it's a good fight says Paul. Soldiers fight even when the result is doubtful, and we honour those that fight when all looks to be lost. The best stories of battle are those when the odds are stacked against the plucky heroes. However, the good fight of faith has a sure end and certain victory. Timothy is to take hold of the eternal life to which he has been called. He has been given a calling - his path is directed by God, the end result doesn't ultimately rest in Timothy's hands.

Paul also mentions the 'good confession' that Timothy has made - this could be referring to his baptism or ordination and what he has publicly confessed as his faith, it could be a reference to his actions that have shown himself to be a man of God to many people. Either way, it's a pointer to the past to show Timothy that he has a strong start, and that he should continue in like manner.

v13-15a

13 I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, 14 to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 which he will display at the proper time—

Now the first half of the super long sentence. Paul charges Timothy, in the presence of God, to keep the commandments unstained and free from reproach until the end. He charges Timothy specifically, but this applies to all believers that read this letter - we are charged to keep the commands of God unstained until the end.

The end being the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ - when at His coming, death is defeated once and for all, in the final resurrection of all men, when those who are in Christ are glorified, and the eternal state begins. Christ will come at the proper time, at the time when God wants things to end. The end is sure, but patience is warranted.

Christ too has made a 'good confession' before Pontius Pilate. On the face of it this might be what Jesus said to Pilate at his trial, but some commentators suggest that this refers to not just that but the testimony of His death that Pilate witnesses. It could be Jesus' words, but as with Timothy's confession, it could be His deeds - His perfect life, death and resurrection.

We also see that God gives life to all things - why would Paul put this into the sentence? All life comes from the author of life, but what does that have to do with Timothy's obedience?

I think Paul includes this because he's getting at the idea that God gives life to our Christian life, as well as our natural lives. The life of our obedience is life that God gives. Just as God gives physical life, He empowers our obedience through His Spirit.

v15b -16

he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honour and eternal dominion. Amen.

Finally, we have a doxology, literally a glory saying, from Greek δόξα, *doxa* 'glory' and -λογία, *-logia* 'saying' or 'word'.

Paul outlines some of the glorious attributes of God. He is above all else - sovereign, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. None else can compare to His highness.

He alone has immortality - He alone is eternal and immortal in the sense of never having been nonexistent, His immortality is not conditioned on it being given to Him. He alone can bestow immortality on us, as the source of life.

He 'dwells in unapproachable light', and no one has seen or can see Him. John tells us (John 1:18):

No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

We cannot approach God, we cannot see God, save through Christ. Christ is how God is made known on earth, to us. Christ, the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15), it's through Him that we can approach the Father and know God at all. John 14:6-7:

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

Lastly, Paul says 'To Him be honour and eternal dominion. Amen'. We know that He is already King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the sovereign over all things - He already has the eternal dominion, and nothing can change that. Yet this is written that we might honour Him, and accept this fact, and give it a hearty amen - that we would agree with it and live by it.

It's no mistake that Paul includes a doxology in a section about obedience. Our obedience is related to how we view God and our love for Him. Jesus tells us John 14:15:

If you love me, you will keep my commandments

And if our sustainance in the fight is from the eternal God, who is sovereign over all, and from whom all good flows, we can trust Him to sustain us.

Christlikeness flows from Christ

Being a good Christian is to be Christlike - to do as Christ in His humanity does, which is to follow perfectly the law of God. Christlikeness flows from Christ - we become more Christlike by being rooted in Him. John 15:4-5:

4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Our union with Christ is what really enables us to bear much fruit, to do good and follow God as we ought.

Galatians 2:20:

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

All our efforts are worthless, if we do not have Christ - if we are not dead to sin, through His death, and alive in faith, through His resurrection, then we cannot accomplish godliness. The fruit is a consequence of our being in Christ. Being in Christ, we have the Spirit and the fruits of the Spirit will manifest in our lives.

Errors

The major errors when it comes to obedience to God, to fighting the good fight, are countered by beholding Christ, by realising we are united to Him.

Pride

First, the trap of pride, of self-righteousness, of salvation by works. We think that we can earn some kind of credit by what we do, that really we're pretty good.

The answer to this is the attitude of humility that Paul has - it's no longer him that lives, but Christ who lives in him. Remind yourself of Christ's obedience and perfection, see yourself in contrast to Him and recognise that you're nowhere near as good as you thought.

Laziness

The second trap is laziness, anti-nomianism, thinking good works don't really matter. Salvation is not by works after all, so why bother?

Again, the answer is to look to Christ - see His obedience, see what He did, see His example for us. It's in recognising that we are united to Him, understanding Him, that our mindset is changed to will our good works. When we see clearly what Christ has done for us, we are motivated to offer ourselves in thanks.

Not measuring up

A third trap is when we work hard, we try our best, but we still don't feel good enough. Neither lazy nor prideful, but still not satisfied, guilty. Again, the answer is to look to Christ and recognise that in Him we are righteous enough - that His righteousness is given to us on the cross and our imperfections and disobedience and sin are all taken from us. Look to Christ to turn from guilt to rejoicing.

Conclusion

Since the very beginning of sin - of disobedience to God - the temptation has been to rely on ourselves rather than on God, to look at our own strength rather than His. That doesn't mean there aren't practical things we can do - there are - but to really strike at the root of temptation and sin requires us to turn away from ourselves and our own strength and turn to Him.

The same tactic has been used since the beginning. In Genesis 3:

▮ *"Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"*

Quickly followed by:

▮ *"If you eat of it ... you will be like God"*

The first temptation, quickly leading to the first sin, that of not trusting God and turning to ourselves instead. This is at the heart of all our sins and temptations and reliance on God instead, looking to Christ, is what will help us to obey.

Paul puts it well in 1 Corinthians 15:10:

I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.