

# CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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**Series:** Special Messages

**Pastor/Teacher**

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## The Last Days and Paul's Admonition to Timothy

**H**arold Camping, the founder of Family Radio, lets out a hearty chuckle when he considers the people who believe the world will end in 2012. "That date had not one stitch of biblical authority," Camping says from the Oakland office he runs Family Radio, an evangelical station that reaches listeners around the world. "It's like a fairy tale." The real date for the end of times, he says, is in 2011. The Mayans and the recent Hollywood movie "2012" have put the apocalypse in the popular mind this year, but Camping has been at this business for a long time. And while Armageddon is pop science or big-screen entertainment to many, Camping has followers from the Bay Area to China. Camping, 88, has scrutinized the Bible for almost 70 years and says he has developed a mathematical system to interpret prophecies hidden within the Good Book. One night a few years ago, Camping, a civil engineer by trade, crunched the numbers and was stunned at what he'd found: The world will end May 21, 2011. This is not the first time Camping has made a bold prediction about Judgment Day. On September 6, 1994, dozens of Camping's believers gathered inside Alameda's Veterans Memorial Building to await the return of Christ, an event Camping had promised for two years. Followers dressed children in their Sunday best and held Bibles open-faced toward heaven. Well, guess what happened? Nothing. Undeterred, Camping revised his figures and now his gullible followers wait with great expectation for May 21, 2011. What will happen? Same as last time this crackpot boldly predicted the return of Christ—NOTHING. We have better things to do than listen to the ravings of a wild-eyed fanatic like Camping. The Bible does indeed emphasize the Second Coming of Christ as Riddlebarger duly notes. "What do we do with those scriptural statements regarding the imminence of Christ's return, in light of those passages that speak of a delay regarding Christ's second coming (i.e., Matthew 25:1 – 13)? We are told that specific signs clearly precede the end (Matthew 24:32), yet we are also told that the Lord can return at any moment (Matthew 24:37). No doubt, the tension between signs preceding the end and the suddenness of the Lord's eventual return is intentional. For one thing, this tension prevents date-setting, since no man knows the date or the hour of the Lord's return (Matthew 24:36). For another, this tension also prevents idleness on the part of God's people. Since we do not know when the Lord will return, we must watch and wait just as Jesus instructed us to do (Matthew 24:42 – 44). Although Jesus' words about no one knowing the date of his return are crystal clear, this has not stopped various prophecy prognosticators from setting dates and unduly speculating about the time of the end despite being forbidden to do so. Yet, we would be foolish to allow such speculative musings to turn us off to the point that we avoid altogether identifying the signs of the end and eagerly awaiting the Lord's return. Not only did the apostolic church declare this hope in the benediction *Maranatha* ('Come quickly, Lord Jesus'), but we should look forward with great expectation to the blessed hope, the glorious appearance of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13)."<sup>1</sup> The Apostle Paul thought of the Christian life as one that is infused with a mighty striving (I Corinthians 9:24 - 27; II Corinthians 4:1,16; Philippians 3:8 - 14; II Timothy 4:7). Paul did not merely find rest in what he had accomplished or received—he set his sights on a goal. Throughout his epistles, as Schlatter observes, "He made ample use of the idea of an athletic contest with the related images of *race, prize, crown or judge* because he needed terms that described the necessity and industry of Christian striving."<sup>2</sup> In the passage before us Paul exhorts Timothy with a threefold injunction: *Flee, Follow, and Fight*. These are first and foremost *attitudes or convictions* apart from which the necessary action would not occur.

### **I. WHAT TO FLEE:** (6:11a)

Timothy is a *man of God* (the expression is also found in II Timothy 3:16,17). According to Berkouwer this expression is taken over from the OT and refers to a close relationship with God—a special relationship of belonging to God, of being covenantally yoked.<sup>3</sup> The word trans. *flee* is PHEUGE. It is in the words of A.T. Robertson a very vivid verb that expresses flight.<sup>4</sup> Paul puts it in the present active imperative which is best trans. "Keep on running away". What is it that Timothy is to flee from? The immediate context makes clear that what Paul has in mind has primarily to do with the worldly preoccupation with wealth (6:9 - 10). It also encompasses teachings and life-styles that are at odds with the Christian faith (6:3 - 5). Note Paul's remarks on how some people use religion as a means of gaining wealth (6:5).

### **II. WHAT TO FOLLOW:** (6:11b - 12)

The negative precept is now followed by the positive. *Follow* (or pursue) is from the Greek word ΔΙΩΚΕ which means to follow after as in a pursuit. What are the objects of this pursuit?

A. A Specific Conduct *Righteousness* and *godliness*. Here and in Titus 2:12 these are used to express a religious

disposition. Our hearts, minds, and wills are to reflect God's standard.

- B. A Specific Character The virtues listed here (faith, love, meekness, and perseverance) correspond to the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). "Everyone," remarked Calvin, "who devotes himself to the pursuit of righteousness, who aims at godliness, faith and love and follows patience and meekness, cannot but abhor avarice and its fruits."<sup>5</sup>

### III. WHAT TO FIGHT: (6:12)

As in the two previous injunctions, this one is also a present active imperative, lit. keep on fighting. The word for *fight* is AGONIZOMAI from which we derive our word *agony* (the same word is found in 4:10). The thought is that of exerting one's energy in order to prevail. The *fight of faith* may mean *first*, the fight that faith wages; in which faith is one of the contending parties; the world, the flesh, and the devil is the other party. In this case, faith is to be taken in the subjective sense. It is an inward organ by which we perceive things unseen and eternal, and through which we experience their favor. In this view the fight of faith is that spiritual conflict which is so fully described in Galatians 5 and Ephesians 6 and elsewhere. *Second*, it may mean *the fight for the faith*. The command, then, is the same as in Jude v. 3: "Contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to the saints." In this case, *faith* is used objectively for the doctrines believed. Paul speaks of those who have "erred from *the faith*." He speaks of himself as having "kept *the faith*." He draws a broad distinction between the "wisdom of the world," and the "wisdom of God." By the former, he means the opinions or convictions which men arrive at by speculation. These may be either true or false. In neither case do they belong to the category of faith. By the wisdom of God he means the truths supernaturally revealed by God; things which "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit." These constitute *the faith* for which we are to contend. They are objects of faith, because they are received on testimony, the testimony of God. The faith therefore delivered to the saints and which we are to preserve, propagate, and transmit, is the truth supernaturally revealed which is contained in the Scriptures. Three important *convictions* are essential to this fight.

- A. The first necessary condition of contention for the faith is the firm conviction that the Bible is the infallible rule of faith, i.e., that whatever the Bible teaches God teaches, and therefore is infallibly true, and consequently no man can reject it without rejecting the testimony of God. If a man allows himself to depart from what he sees the Bible teaches, there is no security for him.
- B. A firm conviction of the importance of the things thus revealed. Without holiness, no man can see God, and without truth there can be no believers. Our own salvation and that of others depends on the truth. Look at the heathen world and those once Christian countries, which have lost the truth.
- C. An inward experience of the power of the truth. No man contends for anything which he does not value. The want of this experience is the great source of error. The way to contend for the truth is, *First*, to confess it, to proclaim it. The power is in the truth. *Second*, to answer misrepresentation and gainsayers. This should be done with meekness, speaking the truth in love, remembering that Paul may plant and Apollos water, but it is God who gives the increase.<sup>6</sup>

CONCLUSION: The New Testament often describes the Christian life as a constant battle against sin. Believers are enjoined to put on the full armor of God so that they may be victorious in their struggle against evil powers (Ephesians 6:11 - 13), to fight the good fight of the faith (I Timothy 6:12; cf. II Timothy 4:7), not to gratify fleshly desires (Galatians 5:16), and to resist sin to the point of shedding their blood (Hebrews 12:4). In I Corinthians 9:26 - 27 Paul describes his own fierce struggle against sin as if he were a boxer. "I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."<sup>7</sup> Old Bishop Ryle put it in these words, "Sanctification...does not prevent a man having a great deal of inward spiritual conflict. By conflict I mean a struggle within the heart between the old nature and the new, the flesh and the spirit, which are to be found together in every believer (Galatians 5:17). A deep sense of that struggle, and a vast amount of mental discomfort from it, are no proof that a man is not sanctified. Nay, rather, I believe they are healthy symptoms of our condition, and prove that we are not dead, but alive."<sup>8</sup>

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> K. Riddlebarger, "You Are Here: The Map of Redemptive History," *Modern Reformation* (Jan./Feb. 2011), p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Adolf Schlatter, *The Theology of the Apostles* trans. A.J. Köstenberger, (Baker, 1999), p. 227.

<sup>3</sup> G.C. Berkouwer, *Studies In Dogmatics: Man the Image of God* (Eerdmans, 1962), p. 344.

<sup>4</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures In the New Testament IV* (Broadman, 1932), p. 594.

<sup>5</sup> *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries X* (Eerdmans, 1964), p. 276.

<sup>6</sup> C. Hodge, *Conference Papers* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1879), p. 372.

<sup>7</sup> A.A. Hoekema, *Saved By Grace* (Eerdmans, 1989), p. 213.

<sup>8</sup> J.C. Ryle, *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots* (rpt. Evangelical Press, 1979), p. 20.