

# CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Overcoming Sin & Temptation		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	1		Gary L.W. Johnson
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## Dealing with Reality: The Truth About What Christians Are Called To Do

The name Neville Chamberlain may not ring a bell with most people today, but to those of you who can remember WWII he is a tragic figure. Chamberlain was the Prime Minister of Great Britain before Winston Churchill. When he returned to London after meeting with Adolf Hitler in Munich, he announced that his meeting with the Nazi leader had been a great success and uttered these now ill-fated words, "I believe it is peace for our time." It was only a matter of days (Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia) before Chamberlain realized he had been played the fool. In less than a year England was in an all out war with Germany. Chamberlain's folly, tragic as it was, does not outdo the folly people commit when they naively assume that they have peace with God when in fact no such peace exists (cf. Isaiah 48:22; 57:21). This is indeed a fool's peace. Hitler conned Chamberlain, and our sinful hearts con us into thinking that our condition is ok, there's no need to be concerned about our sins. It's no big deal. How is it that many who call themselves *Christians* can blissfully ignore the reality of the sinfulness of sin? "It is *indwelling sin*," wrote John Owen, "that both disableth men unto and hinders them from believing, and that alone. Blindness of mind, stubbornness of the will, sensuality of the affections, *all* concur to keep poor perishing souls at a distance from Christ. Men are made blind by sin, and cannot see his excellencies; obstinate, and will not lay hold of his righteousness: senseless, and take no notice of their own eternal concernments."<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 DIÖKE 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 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

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<sup>1</sup> John Owen, “On Indwelling Sin in Believers” in his *Works VI* (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1974), p. 308.

<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.