

How Should We Live? - Kevin Miller, 30 minutes, **1 Timothy 6:11-21** (#540)

Introduction: I've titled this sermon very intentionally. One of the burdens that I want all of us to share is that we Christians can't only *call* Jesus Lord, but that we must *act* like it also. That's the only way to have any reassurance that our faith is real and genuine. It's what bearing fruit that testifies to the Spirit's work in our lives looks like. Always in the Scriptures we find that a disciple is somebody who knows and believes about Jesus not just on an intellectual or emotional level, but that Christians are people who show that knowledge through how we live, how we speak, what we dream of, and what our priorities are. We are a people whose home is in a different kingdom even while we serve our Lord in this kingdom. In contrast, nowhere in the Scriptures do we see that a person can be a follower of Jesus part-time. There is no category for somebody who would claim to be a Christian, who might even be excited to learn about Jesus or study the Bible, yet is unwilling to put into practice – however imperfectly – what they are learning. Quite literally, then, the question that we should be asking every time we open the Word is: “How should we live? What should we do now?” Not only “what shall we think?” – which is vital – but we also must always ask “how shall we act?”

Today we come to the conclusion of **1 Timothy**. I trust you've found this an encouraging journey: one where you can more clearly see not only what you're called to, but how Jesus has done the work and invites each of us to worship Him with our words and actions in response. I have no doubt that this has also been challenging for you; it's certainly challenged me in many ways! Following after Jesus isn't guaranteed to be comfortable; it's intended to make us holy. Being a disciple isn't primarily aimed at what you and I want, what questions we have, but instead at doing what our Lord and Master has called us to do. As we look to

Paul's words this morning in **chapter 6, starting with verse 11**, let's see what his final charge for Timothy, for the Ephesian church, and for us looks like...

6:11-12 We begin by seeing how Timothy, the pastor of the church in Ephesus, is called to live. We can break these two verses into three points: Timothy is to flee, to pursue, and to fight for. First, to flee...

Timothy is to flee "these things." You can guess what I'm going to ask next: "which things?" And the answer is that he is to flee the sort of living that prizes money and possessions, which is what Paul wrote about in **verses 9-10**. But not just those: Paul's point isn't only about money or possessions, but also false doctrine, unbiblical ideas, pride, and the sorts of quarreling and controversies that were common in Ephesus at the time, which was explained in back **verses 3-5**.

So, for you and I, we need to see that there are definite attitudes and choices that we should be fleeing from. The things which so entangle us are ever-present: we are tempted by money and possessions – how could we not be, when our entire society is focused on such things? We are tempted as well by controversy and tribalism – whether political or cultural, and also by the pride of thinking we're the smartest people in the room. None of these temptations have somehow expired or lessened since the first century. You and I, just like Timothy, are to flee from these.

Thankfully, the Scriptures rarely give us a "do not" apart from a "do." It was Thomas Chalmers, the 18th century Scottish preacher who very insightfully pointed out that simply coming up with rules about what *not* to do helps nobody – it almost always results in a soul-killing, joy-destroying legalism. Instead, he called for an "expulsive power of a new affection." Translated into modern English, his point

was that our goal as Christians isn't just to avoid certain things, but also to embrace others; namely, Jesus Christ and all of His goodness. All that He has taught. All that He has done. Everything that He has freed us from. So it is here, where Paul gives Timothy six things to pursue. He is to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, and gentleness.

I doubt any of those words is too difficult for us to understand, so let me pause here for application rather than explanation. Are you pursuing these? How would you know? One way is to take stock of your own life: are you increasingly seeing the righteousness of Christ becoming more evident in your life? Are you making decisions through the filter of what Jesus has said in the Word rather than your own instincts, whatever your preferred sources say, or what people online think is popular or right? Can you say that you are growing in the faith? What would you point to? How's your love for the Lord and for others coming along? I doubt any of us would say we've "arrived," but could you say "yes, my heart is different now than it was a year ago"? And what about your patience? We've all had many opportunities to practice that over the past couple of years – how is that practice paying off? Lastly, what about gentleness? I suspect this might be the one that most of us struggle with, especially given how contentious and divisive our society has become. So: make a plan. Pray. Remind yourself often of these goals. Put a Post-it note on your mirror or in your car if that's what it takes. Fight for holiness.

Which, third, is what Paul calls on Timothy to do. He is to prepare for battle. What does that look like? The answer is given in the second half of **verse 12**: Timothy is to grasp, to take hold of, to lash himself to the mast of eternal life. He is to fight to not be swept overboard by the distractions of the world, to not turn his attention to the cares of this life. What about you? Are you engaged in the fight? I once read

about a soldier writing out a sign to be posted in his barracks: “the enemy trained to kill you today, what did you do?” Our enemies are the devil, our own sinful hearts, and the temptations so often presented by the world. Each are at work to draw your attention and affection from Jesus in ways large and quick as well as small and slow. How are you calling on the Lord to help you in the daily fight?

So, Timothy is to not do, to do, and to fight. But the fuel for all of this isn't his own sense of strength. It isn't his own knowledge or authority – it's Christ's...

6:13-16 The very solemn charge that Paul writes to Timothy isn't just a “do more, try harder” sort of call. Instead, I want you to see the brilliant connection that the Lord inspired Paul to make: he points to Jesus. Jesus is the one who made the good confession long before Timothy did. So when Paul calls him to hold to the good confession in **verse 12** (that is, the faith that Timothy confessed in Jesus, perhaps referring to his ordination as a pastor), notice that the only reason, the only enablement, the only way that Timothy can have any hope of doing that is because Jesus has already done the work in **verse 13**. Timothy – and we – are called to do only what Christ has already done. He is a General who leads from the front, not the rear. A King who doesn't call His people to do anything more than what He Himself was willing to do – and He enables us to do it by His own strength.

Our part? It's to hold to Christ. Not only in the present, but for the future as well. Don't turn aside from Him. Don't become enraptured with whatever the latest fad is about blood moons or Christianity and culture or having your best life in the here and now. No! Look to Jesus, the Author and Perfector of your faith. He may yet come this very year. He may wait until all of us are long in the grave. Whenever His perfect timing, from now 'till then you and I are called to endure.

How shall Timothy live? How did Jesus live? Now: how shall the rich live?

6:17-19 There's a challenge here for each of us: by any definition of "rich," every single person here qualifies. We Americans are, broadly, the wealthiest people on this planet. Even the person who makes the lowest salary in our congregation still has a greater income, better healthcare, better education, and more opportunities than the vast majority of the world outside of similar "first world" countries. So all of these warnings – both here and earlier in the book – directly apply to you and I. You may not feel rich, but you are. These temptations are your temptations, even if you don't recognize or feel them in this moment today. So: what does Paul say?

He tells us that the rich are not to trust in their riches, but in God. This doesn't mean that you shouldn't plan for the future or save money for emergencies. That would be wisdom. It *does* mean that your ultimate plan can't be to rely on your retirement account, on liquidating your emergency fund, or on the lifestyle that you believe you deserve. If the 2008 financial crisis taught us anything, it should be that the economy is fickle. You can do everything "right" and still end up poor. 2020 and 2021 have only reinforced that lesson. Friends: be wise with your money, certainly. But see it not as an insurance policy, nor as your security. Instead, your money is a gift, a tool, given by the Lord not so that you don't need to trust Him, but so that you can provide for your family and direct funding toward others who are in need. It's a tool for Gospel growth, not simply for your own comfort.

Set your hope on the Lord. Trust Him to provide. Next: each of us is to intentionally and specifically look for ways to "do good." Not "good" according to the world's definition, but according to Christ's. What does that look like? Paul

gives two examples: we are to be rich in good works, and we are to be generous and ready to share. “Rich in good works” doesn’t just mean action, but also putting your money where your mouth is. Are you giving towards the priorities that Christ has called His people toward? To the work of this church, if this is indeed your church home, to missionaries, to friends and neighbors as they have need? Similarly, would other people call you generous? Generosity with our money has a spiritual value that goes far beyond the checks we write – it shows something about our beliefs: that Jesus has been infinitely generous with us in salvation. Shouldn’t that change how we respond with our money? Shouldn’t we be every bit as generous with our time and attention and efforts also?

The motivation for this isn’t the sort of “best life now” promised by the health and wealth preachers. Nothing could be further from what the Bible says! Instead, the benefit of living and giving this way is that you’ll store up treasure in heaven, that you’ll be growing spiritually upon a sound foundation of faith rather than a crumbling foundation built upon worldly riches. Live this way, and you’ll take hold of what really matters – that which Paul calls “truly life.”

6:20-21 Finally, we return to Timothy and the Ephesians. The priorities given here are the same as those given all throughout the letter, and the “you” at the end of the letter is plural – it’s not just for Timothy, but for all the Ephesians and for us. So: guard the faith. Beware division and distraction. Call upon the Lord to keep you from swerving. Be generous. Hold to Jesus. Live so that others can see that and, in God’s timing, grow to love Jesus also. As we head toward Christmas, what better way to encourage one another and to show the world that our faith, our hope, is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness? Let’s pray that He would accomplish that work in us as a church...