

Fight the Good Fight for the Faith

I Timothy 6:6-16 (HCSB)

⁶ But godliness with contentment is a great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. ⁹ But those who want to be rich fall into temptation, a trap, and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and by craving it, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains. ¹¹ But you, man of God, run from these things, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight for the faith; take hold of eternal life that you were called to and have made a good confession about in the presence of many witnesses. ¹³ In the presence of God, who gives life to all, and of Christ Jesus, who gave a good confession before Pontius Pilate, I charge you ¹⁴ to keep the command without fault or failure until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵ God will bring this about in His own time. He is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords, ¹⁶ the only One who has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light; no one has seen or can see Him, to Him be honor and eternal might. Amen.

It's an extra special day here at Light of the Valley because today we will witness an adult confirmation. Do you remember your confirmation day? Do you remember the nervousness, the joy, the satisfaction? When I was confirmed back at the traditional confirmation age of eighth grade, I remember my fellow confirmands reciting the answer to their particular questions before the service and asking others if they got the answer right. Me, I was worried that I would drop the microphone or forget how to talk. You know, normal things. In thinking back to your confirmation day, did you feel any different after it was over? Did you feel like you knew it all, that you had finally made it, that you were done? Some people do. But what is confirmation really about?

Confirmation is an opportunity for a person to declare their faith – not just think it, not just study it, but to give voice to their internal convictions. It's not a statement made lightly. Later on in our service today, you will hear me ask the confirmands, "Do you intend to continue steadfast in the teachings you have learned from the Bible and to endure all things, even death, rather than fall away from it? ... Do you intend faithfully to conform all your life to the teachings of God's Word, to be faithful in the use of the Word and sacrament, and in faith and action remain true to God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—as long as you live?" You probably remember something very similar being asked of you. In confirmation, a person makes a promise to God to stay faithful to his Word, to remain active in hearing it and learning it, and to suffer everything, even death if necessary, rather than fall away from it. The life you committed to living at your confirmation makes your life a constant battlefield that will test you greatly.

Confirmation – a public declaration of one's faith in God with a promise to live according to it your whole life – is nothing new. Timothy had made such a confession. Paul knew that making such a declaration of faith was not the end all and be all of the Christian life. This is why he commands him, "Fight the good fight for the faith; take hold of eternal life that you were called to and have made a good confession about in the presence of many witnesses." (verse 12) Timothy, I know you made your confession, but the battle is just beginning. You need to fight for your faith, fight to make good on your confession. Keep to what the Lord has taught you. Keep the faith to this degree: "In the presence of God... and of Christ Jesus... I charge you to keep the command without fault or failure until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ." (verses 13-14)

Keep your confession without fault or failure. As you reflect on your confirmation promises, how well have you done in continuing steadfast in the teachings you have learned from the Bible? How well have you done at faithfully conforming your whole life to the teachings of God's Word?

The challenges of keeping our confession, our promise to God that we make at confirmation, are numerous. Confirmed Christians that Paul knew had lost the good fight due to the love of money. "Those who want to be rich fall into temptation, a trap, and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and by craving it, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains." (verses 9-10) They were not content with what they had. They wanted more than what God had given to them. They were discontent with their lives, malcontented with having just food and coverings. So they pursued wealth, wealth at the cost of their godliness, of making good on their confession of faith, breaking their confirmation promises.

Do you struggle with being content? Is what you have in this life always seemingly lacking? Even though I may have never uttered the words, do I think that life owes me something, that God owes me something? Is my mantra, "Life will be better if I just have...if just this happens...if I can just get through this"?

What is owed to you? Paul wrote, “We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out.” (verse 7) Yet we have a perception of where we should be in life, and when we are not there, we are not happy, not content. Yet we want more. The longer you stay in this mindset that you are lacking, that you don’t have enough, the more you will be malcontent and will seek something else to make you feel content. Eventually, this leaves you with no more fight for your faith. You wander away from the faith, breaking the good confession you made at your confirmation and so you pierce yourself with many pains because you are never happy with that you have.

None of us have kept our good confession of faith without fault or failure, but we have one who has. Christ Jesus “gave a good confession before Pontius Pilate.” (verse 13) He fought the good fight of faith. No, he didn’t enter into a physical fight with Pontius Pilate, but he fought to maintain his perfection knowing that it would be given to us. Jesus stood on trial before Pilate and did not plead his case of how innocent he was, of how wrongfully the Pharisees and Sadducees dealt with him, how they tried to get people to lie under oath to convict Jesus. Instead, Jesus simply admitted to Pilate that he was the King of the Jews, but not an earthly king like Caesar. He confessed to Pilate that his kingdom was from another place and that everyone on the side of truth listens to him, that he came into the world to testify to the truth. Jesus answered straightforwardly, truthfully in his confession. He pursued righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness by his answers, knowing that the crowd would demand his crucifixion, knowing that he would allow it to happen. Jesus kept his good confession without fault or failure. For everyone who has made a confirmation vow and broken it, Christ has kept it without fault or failure for us.

It is this truth that leads us to say today, “I am ready to fight the good fight for the faith” – not on my own, not with my own strength, but with God who called me to believe this, who called me to faith in him as my Savior. Christ Jesus, by his pursuit of godliness, by his contentment of living for God, by his good confession, fills me in every aspect that I am lacking spiritually. It is being filled with the message of Christ and what he has done for me that fuels my power and my strength to fight the good fight of faith, to strive to live up to that confirmation promise that I made, to endure all things, even death, rather than fall from believing in my God.

God is with us to help us fight this good fight. He is the King of kings, and the Lord of lords. He is totally in charge of all things, including the things in life that leave us wanting more, that leave us malcontent. We have the blessed and only ruler, the Sovereign, who is on our side. He’s immortal; he can’t die, can’t leave us. He is light, complete holiness, holiness not found anywhere else but in him. His might is eternal, it doesn’t not end. It doesn’t get stretched out or tired or weak. He is our strength. He brings us through our good fight of faith.

This is why we can be content with whatever we have. We know where we stand with God. We know that he has made his good confession and kept it without fault or failure. He has called us to eternal life. So, “if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these.” (verse 8) There is nothing more we need, because God has taken care of it all. I am content.

Our God will help us fight the good fight for the faith, to take hold of the eternal life which he called us to, to keep our good confession to live for him every single day. So no matter the circumstances you find yourself in, you know that you have him as your God. He is enough. He is enough for you to fight and to win because Jesus has already secured the victory for you. So, fight the good fight for the faith. Be content with the God whom you confess to follow and everything that he has given you because there is no other like him, no other God who has kept his good confession without fault or failure. Amen.