



A Study of 1st & 2nd Timothy

1st Timothy 6:11-21 Coram Deo...

I am reading from 1st Timothy chapter six, verses eleven through 21. If you're using one of the pew Bibles, the passage is located on page 993...1st Timothy 6:11-21.

This is what God's Word says:

ESV 1 Timothy 6:11...But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. 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. 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-- 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 honor and eternal dominion. Amen. ¹⁷ As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. ¹⁸ They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, ¹⁹ thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the

future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life. ²⁰ O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called "knowledge," ²¹ for by professing it some have swerved from the faith. Grace be with you.

We have come this morning to the end of our study in 1st Timothy, and I for one will be sad to see it go. And the fact that I am sad to see it go surprises me a bit. I mean...I...I love all of the Word of God and everything about all of the Word of God, but I have frankly always been more drawn to narratives, the stories of the Bible, than I have been to letters of the Bible. Now I freely admit that that fact is a sign of an inherent weakness in my character, a sign of my own spiritual lack of depth. That is, it is a sign of my own personal weakness and spiritual ineptitude to say I am more drawn more to the stories of the Bible than I am to its letters. But it's true. I just love the stories of the Bible so much, and...I suspect many of you already know that about me anyway. I mean many of you have had to endure the burden of listening to me attempt to teach the Bible these last seven years and five days...so you already know that I am a bit odd in that way. So it seems pointless to deny what is obvious. As my dear old dad used to say, **"It is what it is. It is just that and not something else."**

Anyway, to make a very short point exceedingly long, I think the thing that has happened for me this time in thinking and working through 1st Timothy is that I have actually for the very first time really gotten a sort a sense, a sort of mental picture, of the underlying story going on in 1st Timothy. You see, I had always read 1st Timothy more or less as a kind of manual for church government. You know what I mean...a sort of handbook on how to pick elders and deacons in the church, a guide on what to look for in leaders, a set of directions on how to treat different people groups in the church. And it is that.

Only, it is not *just* that.

It is much more than that.

In one sense, it is a letter from a father to a son. It is a letter from a father to a son in which the father reminds his precious son about what is actually important to him as his father. And you know just getting that burned into my soul has caused me to read almost every line of 1st Timothy differently than I did before. There is a kind of inherent pathos that leaps off the page when you read Paul's letter to Timothy with its proper back-story in mind. I have come to see Paul straining over each and every word. I have come to see him pondering the significance and individual nuance of each word he used. I can almost see him thinking through how Timothy might respond to this phrase or to that bit of instruction. Of course, what Paul wrote *was inspired* by the Holy Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit superintended each and every word Paul wrote so that in the end it became not solely a random collection of Paul's pastoral concerns but also and more importantly the infallible, inerrant word of God himself to His church universal.

Still, you mustn't think writing 1st Timothy was any sort of casual business for Paul. Paul would have sweated bullets writing 1st Timothy. You can tell that simply reading 1st Timothy. At times, Paul cannot contain himself emotionally. There are times in 1st Timothy...times like this morning where the floodgates of Paul's heart just burst open and his love for Timothy, for the gospel, and for the Lord Jesus Christ rolls down like a river.

Paul, you see, wanted to prod Timothy along...to push him along toward the high calling of God in his life, to force him to fulfill his ministry...his destiny as a man of God, but he wanted to do so without discouraging Timothy by what he said. It is always a hard line for a father or mother to walk.

And here's my point, I have seen *all that* this time around more than I ever have before. I suppose it is because I am a father myself, and I want some of the same kind of things for my son and daughter...for my grandchildren...in a different sense even for my students. I suppose it is because I am older and have become stupidly sentimental. But I think reading 1st Timothy this time, this way, I have gotten much farther along not just in understanding one of the twenty-one epistles of the New Testament but perhaps in understanding what it really means to live out ministry *coram deo*.

You do know the phrase *coram deo*, don't you?

It's Latin, of course, and it means before the face of God.

You see what Paul wanted Timothy to do in Ephesus was to stay there and to fight it out with the false teachers that had begun to plague the church there, and the reason he wanted him to do that was because the gospel was hanging in the balance. It was almost as if the gospel had become the center of a huge tug of war. The false teachers were pulling the gospel away and Timothy on the other side of the rope was pulling it back to where it belonged. Paul was very much afraid that if Timothy let go or perhaps even rested in his fight against these false teachers that the gospel might be forever lost there in Ephesus.

So in 1st Timothy Paul explains to Timothy how to fight his fight...how to pull the gospel back to its rightful place. Paul tells him to never stop preaching the gospel. He tells him to be relentless in preaching it. And he tells to appoint men of the same mind to leadership there in the church so that he will have some help on his side of the rope. And then finally, he tells him to instruct the Ephesians as to how to treat each to her so their individual stories will not get in the way of the one important story, the story of the gospel itself.

But here's the most important part. He tells Timothy to do all of that before the face of God.

You can see that in verse thirteen:

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 6:13**...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...

Do you see what Paul is saying?

He is saying, **"I charge you before the face of God...with God watching...with God as our common witness...just as I charge you before the face of our Lord Jesus...to fight the good fight."**

You see what I mean. It is not just Paul saying I want you to do this. It is Paul saying, **"I want you to do this and in case you may have forgotten the Lord God Almighty and our Great Redeemer King, the Lord Jesus Christ are watching."**

That idea, the idea that God sees all that we do, is a fairly common theme in Paul. It is, in fact, a fairly common theme in the Bible. I couldn't help as I wrote this but to think back to the story of Hagar in Genesis 16 where she runs off from the cruel treatment of her mistress Sarah only to fall into deep despair in the desert where she is finally rescued by the Lord God Almighty. There in a wonderful epiphany Hagar speaks and says, "**You are the God who sees me.**"¹ Moses then adds this wonderful little tidbit of information when he says, "**That is why the well there where God appeared to Hagar is called Beer Lahai Roi.**" Beer Lahai Roi means, "**The well of the Living One who sees me.**"

You see what I mean. It is a common theme. It is a common theme in the Bible and it is a common theme in Paul's letters. Listen for a moment to Paul from 1st Corinthians 4.

^{NIV} **1 Corinthians 4:9**...For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like those condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings.

Obviously, if God was putting the apostles on display for the entire universe to see it he must have been watching them himself. It's a bit like the beginning of Job. God calls Satan's attention to Job which meant, of course, God was watching Job himself. Anyway the idea that God is watching Timothy is very much Paul's point here in 1st Timothy 6. Paul wants Timothy to contend for the gospel both because there is a danger of it being lost, and because God is watching.

I wonder how much keeping the thought that God is indeed watching us might impact the way we live, and work and bear witness. I mean we all know that

intellectually, but we very seldom live like we know it. I mean almost every sin I have ever committed has occurred because I have somehow managed to flip the “**Jonah switch**” in my soul and convince myself somehow that that particular moment God is unaware of what I am doing...that he is for that moment in time at least *not really* watching.

It is stupid thing to think, of course. But don't we all seem to forget it...don't we all want to forget...that God is indeed watching all that we do...that his omniscient eye is ever the burning searchlight...seeing and taking note of all what we think or do.

Let me give one illustration as to how getting this right might help us to live more righteously.

There is a wonderful autobiography that was written many years ago by the great pioneer missionary John Paton. When Paton left home on the first leg of his long journey toward foreign missions, his father walked with him the first six miles of his journey unwilling say goodbye. These are Paton's words:

My dear father walked with me the first six miles of the way. His counsel and tears and heavenly conversation on that parting journey are *as* fresh in my heart as if it was yesterday; and the tears on my cheeks flow as freely now as then, whenever my memory takes me back to that scene. His tears fell fast when our eyes met each other in looks for which there was no words! He grasped my hand firmly for a minute in silence, and then solemnly said: "**God bless you, my son! Your father's God prosper you, and keep you from all evil!**" Unable to say more, his lips kept moving in silent prayer; in tears we embraced, and parted. I turned and ran off as fast as I could; and, when about to turn a corner in the road where he would lose sight of me, I looked back and saw him still standing with head uncovered where I had left him gazing after me. Waving my hat adieu, I

was round the corner and out of sight in an instant. But my heart was too full and sore to go much further, so I darted into the side of the road and wept for a time. Rising up cautiously, I climbed the dyke to see if he yet stood where I had left him; and just at that moment I caught a glimpse of him climbing the dyke where he was to look out for me! He did not see me, and after he had gazed eagerly in my direction for a while he got down, set his face towards home, and began to return, his head still uncovered, and his heart, I felt sure, still rising in prayers for me. I watched him through blinding tears, till his form faded from my gaze; and then, hastening on my way, vowed to myself deeply and oft, with the help of God, to live and act so as never to grieve or to dishonor such a father and mother as He had given me. The appearance of my father when we parted has often through life risen vividly before my mind, and does so now as if it had all happened but an hour ago. In my earlier years particularly, when exposed to many temptations, his thought of his parting form rose before me like that of a guardian Angel. It is no pharisaism, but deep gratitude, which makes me here testify that the memory of that scene not only helped to keep me pure from the prevailing sins, but also stimulated me in all my studies, that I might not fall short of his hopes, and in all my Christian duties, that I might faithfully follow his shining example.²

You see what I mean. It is the all-seeing eye. It is the idea of *coram deo*.

I remember reading an interview once with the best-selling author John Grisham. The interviewer asked Grisham why he tended by in large to keep his novels so clean in contrast to most of the other novels in the his genre. I loved Grisham's response, "**Man, you've got to be kidding. My mother is still very much alive.**"

That is, in a way, what is going on here at the close of 1st Timothy. Paul is reminding Timothy that he is watching and even more importantly that God is watching. I say that because there is an extraordinary insertion at the end of Timothy starting in verse eleven.

If you were here last week, you will remember that Paul waxed eloquent in 1st Timothy 6:3-10 on the nature of the false teachers and how that the thing that really motivated them underneath it all was their unflagging greed. The false teachers pushed along in their pursuit of what they called godliness but it wasn't really godliness. It was really just plain old-fashioned heresy, and the thing that pushed them along was the thought that somehow their wicked doctrine might allow them to grow wealthy at the expense of the Ephesians.

All the trouble was, you see, really about money. Look at 1st Timothy 6:3.

^{ESV} **1Timothy 6:3**...If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, ⁴ he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, ⁵ and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.

Paul continues his warning about money in verse nine.

^{ESV} **1Timothy 6:9**...But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

And if you skip down for a moment to verse seventeen, you can see that Paul picks back up the same theme there regarding the intrinsic danger of money.

^{ESV} **1Timothy 6:17**...As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who

richly provides us with everything to enjoy. ¹⁸ They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, ¹⁹ thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

You see what I mean. Early on in the chapter Paul deals with the greed and avarice of the false teachers who want to become rich. At the very end of the chapter Paul deals with those Christians in Ephesus who actually are already rich.

But in between those two sections is an extraordinary insertion. It is an insertion which is somewhat unique in all of the New Testament. It is an insertion that is almost an interjection...you know a very emphatic outburst. In it, Paul reminds Timothy that he is cut from a very different bolt of cloth. It is an insertion in which Paul reminds Timothy that they look at things differently. They neither know riches nor wealth. Nor are they concerned to know them. They are content to be driven by the gospel.

Now I hate to belabor the point but I just don't you to miss it.

Paul changes in mid-stream from talking about the false teachers and the rich in Ephesus to directly addressing Timothy himself. The structure goes "**them, you, them.**"

It is a sort of rhetorical sandwich. It starts with those false teachers in Ephesus who long to be rich, and it ends with the already rich in Ephesus who actually long to please God, and in the middle Paul turns to speak passionately to

Timothy who Paul longs to see defend the treasure with which he has been entrusted.

You can tell that what Paul is going to say to Timothy is going to be really passionate just by the way he begins his address. Paul doesn't begin, "**O Timothy my son**" or even "**Timothy my beloved son.**" He begins rather, "**But as for you, O Man of God.**"

It's funny, I've read that passage hundreds of times and never really thought deeply even once about why Paul would change the way he addresses Timothy here from "**my son**" to "**man of God.**" It is a strange term to use in addressing someone. It is used only twice in the New Testament. It is used here and in 2 Timothy 3 where Paul talks about the benefit of the Word of God. He says:

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 3:16**...All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

I think it is used so rarely because there is a sort of implicit humility taken up by ministers of the gospel in the New Testament. It is implied, I think, that ministers of the gospel ought not to go around beating down their flock by constantly reminding them that they are in fact the "**man of God.**"

So the phrase doesn't get used much in the New Testament.

But it is used all the time in the Old Testament. It is a term that was often applied to the prophets of old. It is used of Moses. It is even used of King David. But it is used especially of Elijah.

I think that is a bit surprising. I'm not sure I would have ever thought of Timothy and Elijah in the same category.

But Paul does.

Look at verse eleven.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 6:11**...But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. 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.

I'm not sure that the whole reference to "fleeing" isn't purposely intended to be an allusion to Elijah.

Anyway, you see my point. It is not Timothy the weak or Timothy the soft or Timothy the timid. It is rather, "**Timothy, O man of God.**"

I can tell you had the Apostle Paul ever addressed me as "**O man of God**" I think I would grown a foot taller and a foot less wide right on the spot.

And you know in a sense, Paul *has done that*.

Every man or woman that has been called to ministry, every lay person that is called to teach a Sunday School class or vacation Bible School class is in one sense, "**a man of God.**"

Anyway, look at what Paul wants Timothy to do.

He wants him to **“flee such things.”** What are those things he wants Timothy to flee? He wants him to flee the stupid mindless idea that there is a sort of godliness that leads to material wealth. He wants him to flee the laundry list of sins Paul charges to the false teachers. He wants Timothy instead to pursue **“righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, and gentleness.”** In other words, he wants him to pursue a life of godliness meaning the kind of godliness that a saving knowledge of the gospel gives. He wants him to **“fight the good fight.”** He wants him to fight the good fight that he was called to fight in his ordination when he confessed the great common faith that all ministers of the gospel must confess prior to taking up the mantle of ministry. And Paul wants Timothy to do that remembering all the while the great sea of witnesses that were there to witness his confession of the faith and his great and noble calling to Christian ministry. And if it isn’t enough, Paul wants Timothy to remember the fact that there are two others who were there and are now just as present as the faces that Timothy can remember. Paul does that in verse thirteen.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 6:13**...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-- 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 honor and eternal dominion. Amen.

“Timothy, my son, thou man of God, I charge you both in the presence of Almighty and in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ who himself made a good confession in front of Pontius Pilate to keep this commandment regarding the gospel, and I charge you to do that all the days of your life until

Christ our great redeemer and King shall himself appear. You know of whom I speak...Him that is Sovereign, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords. Do this Timothy for Him who alone has immortality and who dwells in unapproachable light...who deserves all that we could ever do and more."

Paul reminds Timothy that the Lord is watching and will continue to watch and that he is immortal, invisible, God only wise and reminding himself of all that causes Paul to burst into praise and benediction. And then Paul turns again briefly to his original line of thought about riches and money.

Look at verse seventeen.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 6:17**...As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. ¹⁸ They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, ¹⁹ thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

And you can see Paul's line of thought. The Christian rich are intrinsically different than those who simply want the gospel for what they can get out of it. And they have a ministry of their own every bit as important as that of Timothy. That is why Paul charges Timothy to charge them not to be snobs...not to set their hope and self-confidence on the uncertainty of riches...on what may very well be here today and gone tomorrow. Paul wants Timothy rather to charge them to generous in the same way God is generous. He wants them to be ready to share because in doing so they will be storing up real treasure for themselves. Paul's point is that money should never become an end in itself because in time

money itself will come to an end. Money is a tool and when it becomes an end in itself that is not just a sign of greed or avarice but really a sign of unbelief.

And then Paul wraps up his letter to Timothy by repeating his major theme for his letter to Timothy one last time. Look at verse twenty.

ESV 1st Timothy 6:20...O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called "knowledge," ²¹ for by professing it some have swerved from the faith. Grace be with you.

In verse twenty, Paul bookends and repeats almost exactly what he said at the end of the opening section of his letter in 1st Timothy chapter one. Listen to 1st Timothy 1:6.

ESV 1st Timothy 1:6...Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, ⁷ desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions. ⁸ Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, *uses it* ¹¹ in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted. ¹² I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service...

You see how the same themes, same ideas, same words have been repeated one final time...in chapter one it is *the gospel with which I was entrusted*; in chapter six it is *guard the deposit entrusted to you*. In chapter one it was...*false teachers have wandered away into vain discussion*; in chapter six it is *their babble and contradictions have caused them to swerve away from the faith*. In chapter one it is *God has given me strength with regard to the gospel entrusted to me*; in chapter six it is *guard what has been entrusted to you as God gives you grace*.

Paul closes his letter almost exactly the same way he opened it.

When I began this study some six months ago, I opened our study with this. My dad found this old, enormous Crescent wrench years ago while plowing a field on the little farm he owned...the little farm that had originally been owned by my great-grandfather and then by my grandfather, and then my father, and has long since been passed on to me and my brothers and sister.

This old, pitted wrench was extremely meaningful to my dad and along the way has become just as meaningful to me. That is because it originally belonged either to my grandfather or perhaps even to my great grandfather. It is a strange feeling to hold in one's hand something that belonged to your great grandfather. Anyway, before my dad died, he gave this to me and said, **"Here keep this and don't lose. It's important not just to me but to you as well."**

That's what Paul has done here in his First Letter to Timothy. He has argued along the way that Timothy needed to guard the gospel that had been entrusted to Paul and was in turn entrusted by Paul to him. He has argued that Timothy needed endurance and faithfulness and that he ought never let complicated theological word games get in the way of the gospel. And Paul's words to Timothy are just as true for here this morning some two thousand years later.

May the Lord Jesus himself grant us grace and endurance to keep the main thing the main thing all the days of our lives and *as we do that* may we do that remembering that we are doing so under the watchful eye of Almighty God.

Let's pray.

¹ NIV **Genesis 16:7**...The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. ⁸ And he said, "Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" "I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered. ⁹ Then the angel of the LORD told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her." ¹⁰ The angel added, "I will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count." ¹¹ The angel of the LORD also said to her: "You are now pregnant and you will give birth to a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the LORD has heard of your misery. ¹² He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers." ¹³ She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me." ¹⁴ That is why the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; it is still there, between Kadesh and Bered. ¹⁵ So Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne.

² John G. Paton, *John G. Paton: Missionary to the New Hebrides...Edited By His Brother*, (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co, 1907), pp. 38-9.