

Fact Sheet for **“Take Hold of Eternal Life”**
1 Timothy 6:11-21

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I was sitting in the crowd at the Andrew Palau evangelistic meeting in Eugene last night. I was reminded that accepting Christ is just the beginning of the journey. Living for the Lord is moment-by-moment. This is what 1 Timothy is about.

The verses in 1 Timothy 6:11-16 are actually a continuation of verses 3-10. Paul, in those verses, wrote about the ones who were causing problems in the church at Ephesus where Timothy was ministering. Those individuals were the ones in chapter 1 who were pressing new believers to follow the Mosaic Law. They were causing several difficulties in the church. And one of their primary motivations was the stipends that were usually given to those who taught. Paul wrote about this motivation of “some” in verse 10. In verse 11 the words “But as for you” grammatically are emphatic in contrast with “some” in verse 10.

¹¹ ¶ But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.

Paul warned Timothy to flee from bad doctrine and this wrong motivation for ministry. Instead Paul encouraged him to pursue “sound” doctrine (compare verse 3) that is defined by virtuous character.

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.

Paul began with an athletic allusion, “fight the good fight of faith”.

His words “Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called” were not about Timothy becoming a Christian. Instead they were about embracing the character virtues that are consistent with that eternal life we already have as Christians, and that we will fully enjoy in the future.

In this letter Paul repeatedly and directly addressed Timothy with personal charges. The second strongest is in 5:21. But 6:13-16 is the strongest. Timothy unswervingly had held to what was true (*made the good confession*) in the presence of many witnesses. Jesus Christ had held unswervingly to what was true (*made the good confession*) in the presence of Pontius Pilate. Now Paul gave a charge to Timothy in the presence of the Father and in the presence of Jesus Christ.

¹³ I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and (*in the presence*) 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.

Paul was charging Timothy “to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach”. What commandment? What Paul referred to was broader than any single law. This commandment was the entire body of sound teaching Paul had been describing throughout this letter. Paul was charging Timothy to keep himself unstained from sin and free from reproach until Christ returned. For Timothy this would mean for the rest of his life.

15b-16 is a doxology that existed in Paul’s day. Are these words about the Father, or the Son, or about God in general? The titles “King of kings” and “Lord of lords” are applied to Christ twice in the book of Revelation (17:14; 19:16). But “Lord of lords” first described God in Deuteronomy 10:17 and in Psalm 136:3. Then this doxology says that God “dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see.” This truth is stated in Exodus 33:20 and is repeated in John 1:18. But people saw Christ.

Where do I fall out on this? First, the book of Revelation had not yet been written when Paul penned this letter to Timothy. Second, the title “king of kings” in the OT is used of two kings of Babylon (Ezekiel 26:7; Daniel 2:37) and of Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:12), but not of God. Third, this doxology may have had its origin in OT theology prior to the appearance of Christ. It’s really impossible to say with certainty, but I would suspect that this was a doxology from OT times that referred to God (the Father). He is the one who will decide when Christ will return (compare 1 Timothy 6:15a).

Look at Matthew 24:36 (and its parallel in Mark 13:32).

ESV Matthew 24:36 ¶ “But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.

Paul had given a charge to Timothy. Now he told Timothy to give a charge to those who had wealth. Those who were teaching Law observance and who deeply desired to be wealthy would also obviously hear of these thoughts from Timothy.

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.

Then as a last comment Paul tells Timothy to guard the deposit entrusted to him (the sound teaching) and avoid false knowledge”. This was how Paul characterized what the Law observers were teaching.

20 ¶ O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called "knowledge," 21a ¶ for by professing it some have swerved from the faith.

21b Grace be with you.

What should we do with all of this? This whole book is about living with the virtues of our eternal life in mind. This is sound doctrine.

Accepting Christ is the beginning of the journey. Living with the virtues of the eternal life we will enjoy is day-by-day. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called.