

*The Blessed and Only Sovereign: 1 Timothy 6:13-16*  
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My hope for us as we look at this passage together this morning is that these truths will land on our hearts with an amazing impact. The things that are written in these verses are magnificent beyond our comprehension. And I pray that God will overcome our apathy and our distracted minds and our dullness and blindness so that we can see how amazing these truths are! Whatever you have experienced this week (and I know that some of you have faced horrific trials), the things that we read here in God's Word are a rock that we can stand on. It's my hope and prayer that God will put this rock under our feet so that we might look to Him and hope in Him even in the most difficult trials of life.

These awesome truths that Paul states in verses 13-16 are built around an exhortation, which is the fifth and final exhortation that he gives in this paragraph. Last week we saw four exhortations in verses 11-12, and this morning we will see a fifth exhortation, embedded in these glorious statements about God and Christ. The commands in verse 11 are "flee" and "pursue." We are to flee from sin and pursue righteousness. Then the commands in verse 12 are "fight" and "take hold of." We are to fight the good fight of the faith, and thus take hold of eternal life. And now the fifth command is found in verse 14, "to keep the commandment."

Let's first look at this exhortation (this charge) that Paul gives to Timothy, and to us, in verses 13-14, which includes a statement about God's nature and about Christ's example. Then we'll consider the reference to Christ's appearing in verses 14-15. And finally, we'll meditate on the doxology of verses 15-16, as Paul exults in the glory of who God is.

**Exhortation (verses 13-14)**

Paul says to Timothy at the beginning of verse 13, "I charge you . . ." Then it's not until the beginning of the next verse that we see the content of the charge. "I charge you . . . to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach." There are many different suggestions of what Paul might be referring to here as "the commandment," but it seems most likely that he's using it very broadly to speak of the Gospel, according to which we must live our lives. This would be in line with the exhortations in the previous verses. Flee from sin. Pursue righteousness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of eternal life. And Paul continues here with great emphasis to say, "I charge you to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach." As you fight the fight of faith, be reminded that the intensity with which

you fight will reflect on the message of the Gospel. If you live like the world, then your identification with the Gospel will bring reproach upon the Gospel. People will say, What's so special about Christianity if so-and-so calls himself a Christian and yet he's just like everyone else. Press on, brothers and sisters, in the fight of faith, so that we might not tarnish the Good News that we proclaim or bring reproach upon our Savior.

Paul further emphasizes this exhortation by putting it in the context of the presence of God and of Christ Jesus. And he provides a brief description of God and Christ Jesus which serve as an encouraging reminder in light of these exhortations. He describes God as the one who gives life to all things. This is a reminder that we depend on God for everything. He created the entire universe out of nothing. He sustains everything that exists. Our existence is entirely dependent on Him. So as we live out the daily battle of the Christian life, we must be looking to our Creator and Sustainer, the One who gives life to all things.

Then, in the mention of Christ Jesus, we're reminded that in his testimony before Pontius Pilate He made the good confession. Before Jesus was killed, He was delivered over to Pontius Pilate, the governor of Judea. And here's what we read in Matthew 27:11-14 about Jesus' good confession before Pilate. "Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You have said so." But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he gave no answer. Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?" But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed." Jesus' confession was simply to affirm that He is the King of Jews. It was a true statement. It was a bold statement. It was an intensely controversial statement. And it was a courageous statement, because it cost Him His life. His claim that He was the Messiah was the basis for the religious leaders and the crowd insisting that He must die.

And the amazing thing is that Jesus did not defend Himself. He made His good confession, affirming His identity. But then He remained silent in the face of repeated accusations. As Isaiah 53:7 foretold, "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth." John Calvin says of this, "although Christ chose to be silent before Pilate, rather than speak in his own defense, because he had come [there]—devoted already to a certain condemnation; yet in his silence there was a defense of his doctrine not less magnificent than if he had defended himself with a loud voice. He ratified it by his blood, and by the sacrifice of his death, better than

he could have ratified it by his voice” (Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles).

What an awesome Savior we have, who was devoted to certain condemnation. He knew the plan. He knew what was going to happen. And in humble submission to the Father’s will He opened not His mouth in His own defense. He made the good confession, affirming the truth of His Kingship over the Jews. And then He fell silent, and went silently to His death. But in His death, and in His resurrection, He spoke. And He ratified His claims. He demonstrated that He is who He says His is. He is the Messiah. He is the King of the Jews. He is One with the Father. Everything He said about Himself is absolutely true. He is the way and the truth and the life, and nobody comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6). Therefore Jesus is the object of our faith. It is in Him that we must place our trust. By turning away from our sin in repentance and embracing Jesus as our Savior and Lord and treasure, we are united to Him in such a way that our sin is counted as His and His righteousness is counted as ours. He pays the penalty for our sin, and we receive the reward for His righteousness, which is eternity in heaven. This is such Good News, and it is all goes back to Jesus making the good confession before Pilate, affirming that He is the King of the Jews, and then allowing Himself to be accused and abused and put to death, in order to accomplish the most glorious event in all of history—the God-Man dying in the place of sinners, so that God might be just and the justifier of those who have faith in Jesus. What an awesome Savior we have, and it’s in Him we place our trust.

In the context of this verse here in 1 Timothy 6 we recognize that Jesus is not only the object of our faith, but also an example of faith. We must not only look to Jesus in faith, but we also look to Him as an example of how we should live out a life of faith. He is not *merely* an example. Many go wrong when they begin to think of Jesus primarily as an example and minimize His sacrificial death on the cross. But we must recognize both. He is the object of our faith. And He is an example of faith. This is how Paul is encouraging Timothy here. Remember how Christ Jesus in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession. Timothy, you make the good confession, too. Speak the truth in the face of opposition. Be steadfast to the end. So we see Jesus here as the object of our faith—the One who went to the cross to pay the penalty for our sin—and also as an example of faith, the One who trusted wholeheartedly in the Father’s plan, even as He went to His death. Be encouraged by this as you fight the good fight of the faith.

### **Christ's Appearing (verses 14-15)**

Next, let's look at this reference to Christ's appearing. Paul charges Timothy to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach *until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ*. This is the duration of our fight of faith. We must flee sin and pursue righteousness and fight the fight of faith and take hold of eternal life and keep the commandment unstained, and we must persevere in this until Christ returns. This is a reference to Christ's second coming. In one instance Paul uses this word to refer to Christ's first appearing (2 Timothy 1:10). But in the other places he uses this word, including here, he is thinking of Christ's second coming, when He will come to judge. And that's the emphasis of the statement here, that we must persevere to the end for on that day we will stand before Him to give account for our lives. And our lives will either give evidence that we were living by faith in Jesus Christ, or that we were living in dependence upon our ourselves.

Brothers and sisters, persevere in this fight. It's not a sprint, but a marathon. It's not a fad that we get involved in for a season and then move on to other interests. This is our life, for the duration of our existence. And it is a glorious life. It is the only true life. So let us press on to the end, looking with great anticipation to Christ's return, and living in reverent fear of the judgment that will come on that day.

Paul then adds to this statement about Christ's appearing that God will display this at the proper time. Paul doesn't know when the appearing will be. In fact, Jesus said in Matthew 24:36 that "concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only." And Paul here states that God the Father will cause this to happen at the proper time. God knows when He will end this age and bring all things to fulfillment. He has it all planned out. There are no uncertainties with Him. And that should bring us great comfort. In the past, all things have happened according to His will. Today all things are happening exactly according to His will. And we can have confidence and assurance that in the future all things will continue to happen precisely as He has planned.

### **Doxology (verses 15-16)**

This mention of God's plans stirs Paul's heart and prompts the doxology of verses 15-16. And, again, my hope and prayer for each of us this morning is that these glorious truths about who God is will be a rock under our feet—in the happy times and the sad times, in times of plenty and times of need, when our hearts are overflowing with joy in God and when our hearts are downcast—I want us to be able to preach to ourselves these truths and counsel our own hearts to hope in God. I want us to say with the Psalmist,

“Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God” (Psalm 42:5).

As we counsel our own souls in this way, we need to have an arsenal of truth about God with which to fight this battle. Our minds need to be saturated with biblical truth about who God is and how great He is, so that we can direct our affections toward Him. This doxology is a wonderful summary of some of God’s attributes.

First, He is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. The word for blessed, *makarios*, is found in many other places in the New Testament. For instance, in the Beatitudes. But only here and in 1 Timothy 1:11 do we find it used as a description of God. In 1:11 Paul refers to “the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.” And here Paul again refers to the blessed and only Sovereign. *Makarios* means “blessed” or “happy,” and here we have a glimpse into the happiness of God. One commentator says that this designates “God as containing all happiness in Himself and bestowing it on men” (Lock, quoted in George Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 269). We serve a happy God. He is not a miserable old man, as some people might perceive him to be. He is not dismayed or distraught by the things that are happening in our world. He does grieve over sin. But He is also Sovereign even over sin, and He rejoices in the ultimate plan of this universe, which will highlight His glory and His grace in a way that no other plan could accomplish. Therefore our God is a happy God. He is a blessed God. And He enjoys this blessedness and happiness because He is entirely good and He is absolutely sovereign. His plans are good and right, and He has the power to carry out His plans. Nothing can stop Him. He is the only Sovereign.

He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. The rulers in this world, the kings and lords of this world, who have some measure of sovereignty, some measure of authority and control, are completely under the authority and control of God, whether they realize it or not. God is the only absolute Sovereign. Nobody has the power that He has. Nobody can oppose Him in a way that will thwart His plans in any way. He is invincible. He cannot be conquered or overcome. And this gives us assurance that whatever His plans are concerning Christ’s appearing, those plans will happen exactly according to His will. We don’t have to wonder whether God is going to come through on this. He will. He will accomplish His purposes. No one can stop Him.

The second truth about God that Paul exults in here is the fact that God alone has immortality (verse 16). Now there’s a sense in which all of us are immortal. We will all live forever

either in heaven or hell. Those who repent of their sin and trust in Jesus will live forever in heaven. Those who reject Christ and continue in their sin will live forever in hell. Every human being is immortal in this sense. But our immortality is a derived immortality. We have life because God has given it to us and sustains us in it. Acts 17:28 says, “In him we live and move and have our being.” So the life we have is a life we have in Him. But God has life in Himself. He is the source of life. He has always existed, and will always exist. He never came into being, and He will never die. And thus it can be said in an absolute sense that He alone has immortality.

In an earlier doxology in this letter, in 1:17, Paul referred to God as immortal. And in 3:15 there’s a reference to “the church of the living God.” And all of these comments point us to the fact that our God is the only true God. He is immortal, the living God. He is not an idol who is dead and powerless. He is not a mere earthly power that will eventually fade and die. He is the One true and living God, who will always live and always reign on high.

Thirdly, also in verse 16, God dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. This calls to mind when Moses asked the Lord, “Please show me your glory.” And the Lord responded, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The Lord.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But, he said, you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live” (Exodus 33:18-20). The reason we cannot see God is because He is holy and we are sinful. In His holiness and righteousness and perfection, He is unapproachable. Sinful humanity cannot enter His presence. We cannot see Him. We can know Him to the extent that He has revealed Himself to us in His Word, and we are so grateful for this. But we cannot experience Him in the way we long to experience Him. We cannot now see Him as we will in heaven, when we are rid of our sinful natures and can dwell in His presence and behold Him as He is. 1 John 3:2 “but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.” That’s when we will see Christ as He truly is. That’s when we will be ushered into God’s presence to see Him and enjoy Him forever.

Finally, Paul attributes to God honor and eternal dominion. God deserves all our reverence and respect and honor. And as we’ve seen in the previous statements here in these verses, God possesses eternal dominion. He is the only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

All of these truths about God assure that He will bring about the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. And this is connected to the exhortation of verses 13-14, that we must keep the

commandment unstained and free from reproach. So as we look at this paragraph as a whole (verses 11-16), we see exhortations which are rooted in foundational truth about God and Christ. We see imperative statements grounded in indicative statements. This is such an awesome and unique feature of the Christian Scriptures, that we are commanded to do things, but the commands we receive are ultimately grounded in truth about who God is and what Christ has done to save us.

In these verses we are commanded to flee sin, pursue righteousness, fight the good fight of the faith, take hold of eternal life, and keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach. But those commands are connected to and grounded in the glorious truths that God gives life to all things and Christ made the good confession before Pontius Pilate, and that Christ is coming back again, and that God is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 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.

Do you see the beauty of this? We are exhorted to fight the fight of faith, and we are responsible to do so. But we are enabled to do so, and it's only possible for us to do so, as we rely on the God who gives life to all things and controls all things and is immortal and holy and deserving of all honor. So I encourage all of us to stand on this rock—these truths about our amazing God. And as we stand on this rock we will find the strength to persevere in the fight of faith. By His grace we will nurture our desire to know Him and cling to Him, and to run away from anything that hinders our relationship with Him. Brothers and sisters, let us fight the good fight of the faith, and let's use this arsenal of glorious truths about God as we fight.