

September 25, 2022

1 Timothy 6:6-12, 17-19

### “Fight the Good Fight”

Wanna fight? Me neither. How many of you have ever gotten in trouble for fighting? (Raise hand) For most of us this occurred when we were young – struggling to find our way: frustrated and lacking other tools to manage volatile situations. Not that this doesn't happen with people a variety of ages, but the percentages go down as we age.

We don't have very good images of fighting, do we? I often wondered growing up when we would watch *boxing* how it was that this was considered okay in the ring and earned you a trip to the principal's office at school. Fighting with our words and emotions can be equally as damaging even though we all repeated that lie about sticks and stones.

One of the saints of a congregation I served in years past had taken part in some harsh realities in World War II. He said to me one day, “Do you know that phrase, *fight the good fight*? I like it a lot better now that I know it is in the Bible.” My friend struggled, as do we all, to understand fighting as an image we may appropriate *for good*. The word for fight is rooted in the idea of a place of contest and came to mean *any kind of conflict*. We are not fans of conflict – and this just feels awkward.

But perhaps not as awkward as what may be *the most misquoted passage* of the Bible. How many times have we been told the Bible says, “*Money is the root of all evil?*” Since we must manage and deal with money in our lives that would paint us in a corner from which there is no escape. But that isn't what our passage says, is it? ***The love of money*** is a compound word – the first part being *love which belongs with your family* and the second part being *silver*.

It becomes easier to begin imagining our delicate relationship with money when we understand the importance of keeping things in their proper place: love your family and other people and use your money for what is needed – not the other way round.

Our passage began telling us that there is much gain in *godliness with contentment*. This stands in opposition to *looking to material wealth for our contentment*. Our passage today is loaded with hard truths – and each of them

leads us to *focus for living*. **Fight the good fight** is not about hitting someone to get our way. The imagery is there to get us to focus. We too often believe that God is one small part of the bigger picture of life. If we think of life as a sporting event – our author wants us to know that living the life of faith is like the Olympics: something we work hard to be a part of and ***never offer anything but our best***. We are called to effort and buy in - not violence.

And that money stuff – so uncomfortable for us as we struggle to manage living a life as ***citizens of the kingdom of God*** making our way through this very material world. The passage doesn't say money is bad. The passage makes a very pragmatic argument that you can't take it with you and our lives are better focused on God's life, which is forever.

The word describing what we get when we love money in the way we should love people is not the word we expect for "evil" – it is instead the word we might expect to render as *bad*. And bad in the sense that it has *no weight or merit or purpose*. ***The love of money leads us to value things which are empty rather than full – of little consequence rather than lasting.***

From what is written we can tell there were people in church who were sure they were better than everyone else because they had more material wealth. *Our society allows us to feel this way*. We give more breadth and respect to the rich than to the poor. And our author warns us we have made a fundamental mistake in so doing. We are encouraged not be too big for our britches when we compare ourselves to one another - but instead, to be humble as we give our lives to the things of God.

Two tough topics in this passage – ***fighting and money***. And only God knows how many times humans have fought over money. In each case we are called to a new way of imaging what it means to live as God's children: To give our ***best efforts in God's service***, and to pursue things which have ***weight and consequence*** in life.

I still don't want to fight. But I am inspired *to imagine new ways in which I can give back the life God first gave to me* with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love. ***Let us fight the good fight with righteous means for holy purposes.*** Let us fight the good fight for the values of the kingdom of God. Let us fight the good fight as if our lives mattered. Because they do.