

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## Flee, Follow, Fight

*But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.* (1 Timothy 6:11–12, KJV 1900)

Frequently Old Testament writers refer to faithful, godly men as "Man of God." Only here do we find this title used in the New Testament, so we regard Paul's reference to Timothy by this title as an exceptional honor. The title describes one who stands for God faithfully against opposition as a spiritual leader and as an example to all believers.

In following God Timothy should pursue objectives different from the acquisition of wealth for selfish purposes. He should emphasize what the Holy Spirit seeks to produce in the life of a Christian (Gal. 5:22–23) and what is essential for a leader of God's people (3:1–3).<sup>1</sup>

Having spent a secular career in accounting and finance, I have found it amazing how consistently the passion for money blinds people to any other issue. I have known a few ministers who were blessed with unusual amounts of material wealth. I've also known a few who pursued wealth to the destruction of their ministry, most often losing that ever-evasive wealth as well as their ministry. For a minister to pursue money requires him to violate Paul's strong counsel to Timothy. In contrast to the seeker of wealth who blinds himself to other issues, Timothy is to actually run away from this pursuit—"...flee these things...." Instead of pursuing material gain, the "Man of God" must flee it. Once he has set this godly life-course he may then pursue the things that God would have a faithful minister, a true "Man of God," seek.

My final secular career activity involved building a successful health insurance business. When I first left the accounting field and entered this field, a successful leader in the business strongly urged me to approach all the people I knew in my church about life insurance. Exploit my church friends to grow my income. I didn't argue with him, but I also didn't follow his advice. I would have violated my conscience dreadfully by so doing. Over the years this man often scratched his head at my methods. I didn't follow much of his advice, but, nevertheless, I developed a successful business.

Rather than make himself a burden to the churches that he started, Paul occasionally resorted to his secular career, making and selling tents, but he didn't exploit church members for gain. Nor did he forsake his ministry to develop a successful tent franchise business. The preacher who builds a reputation that attracts the people who know him best to refer to him as a "Man of God" will not permit financial compromise to weaken or to destroy his ministry.

Kenny Rogers made a song famous, entitled "The Gambler." In the lyrics of the song, an old, dying professional gambler draws an analogy from his gambling career to advise Rogers about life, "You gotta know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em, know when to walk away, know when to run." If we apply the logic of these lyrics to our passage, we may learn much about wisely serving God. We need to know when to flee, when to follow, and when to fight. Perhaps the first logical step in this process is to know what to flee, whom—and what—to follow, and whom/what to fight. If we flee the wrong things, we may ignorantly run headlong into the arms of the very things that Paul here teaches us to avoid.

To follow in the sense of Paul's lesson does not mean to gently lean in the direction, or to approach our ministry half-heartedly.

...to do something **with intense effort** and **with definite purpose or goal**—"to do with effort, to strive toward."<sup>2</sup> (Emphasis added; JH)

Do not overlook that a preacher is just as human as you are, so do not be surprised that his devotion to ministry requires—demands—that he curb his personal appetites and ambitions, and that he work fiercely and diligently to direct his life to the qualities and behaviors that honor his ministry.

What are the traits that Paul directs us to so intensely pursue?

<sup>1</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, 1 Ti 6:11 (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., 662 (New York: United Bible societies, 1996).

1. *...follow after righteousness....* Right living. Moral integrity. With the passing years, I am amazed at the frequency with which very sincere, well-meaning people, including professing Christians, consciously ignore God, ignore Scripture, choose their own ways, and then become disillusioned when their choices turn sour. How could such unrighteous behaviors result in any other outcome? To follow righteousness does not mean that we choose our own way. It means that we turn from our own ways and choices, favoring—and following—God’s stated values and behaviors that He in Scripture describes as righteous. This goal requires that we inform ourselves regarding what Scripture teaches, and that we then practice those behaviors in our lives. Often this behavior will require us to curb our personal philosophies and preferences. Hello! What did Jesus intend when He warned us that true, faithful discipleship equates to denying self and to bearing a cross to the place of execution? What is “Righteousness”? In the simplest of terms, it is “Right living.” It means consistently working at living by a measure outside self, a specific measure of what is right and wrong that appears, fully and wholly, only in Scripture. Paul’s counsel, “...follow after...” indicates that we shall never fully arrive at this goal, but his words also demand that we never stop working at the activity.
2. *...godliness....* We discovered this word at the beginning of our present study of the New Testament church. When Paul referred to the “...mystery of godliness...” (1 Timothy 3:16), he was referring specifically to the God-like life of the Lord Jesus Christ, God Incarnate, God manifest in human flesh. We cannot ignore God’s character or His clear and specific instructions in Scripture and claim that we are pursuing “godliness.” The pursuit of godliness shall invade every facet and every aspect of our lives. It alters the way we go about choosing our life partner. It will transform the way we go about raising our children, the ethics we follow in our career, and the manner in which we interact with the people around us. In some Christian circles in our time the cliché, “WWJD,” “What would Jesus do?” is common. The question is good, but where do you go to answer the question? Do you need to ask? We have one source for clear and faithful direction, Scripture and Scripture alone.
3. *...faith....* The New Testament refers to faith in a number of different ways, but it never uses this word apart from a clear reference

to our respectful, submissive, and obedient reaction to God in our lives. The quality of New Testament faith requires that we do what Scripture directs us to do and to trust God, without qualification and without reservation, to provide our needs and to guide us through the maze of life’s choices. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reminds us that He provides for lilies in the field, ***not lilies in a professional lily nursery***. If God provides for lilies in a field, Jesus assures us that God also knows our lives, our needs, and our trials, and He promises to provide for our needs, if we trust Him and rely on Him—“in faith.” Because of the grave theological error that is quite popular in our time, replacing the object of faith, the Lord Jesus Christ, with the quality of faith itself, we live in an age more confused by faith than informed. Several years ago a respected preacher confided to me, “I used to know what I believed about justification by faith, but I don’t know anymore.” I bit my tongue, but I strongly wanted to shout back at him, “Then you need to get out of the pulpit and be real quiet till you figure it out.” The humanistic eternal salvation view most popular in our culture tries to segregate faith from works. After all, you can’t follow Scripture’s plain teaching that salvation is not by works, and turn around and demand some form of works for salvation. So, the confused theology strongly protests that faith, producing belief, is not a work, so God requiring faith of you for your eternal salvation does not mean that God requires works. The confused souls who hold to this view need to read John 6:29 at least three times a day. Simply stated, Jesus categorically said that our believing on Jesus is a work. Not only is this belief a work, but it is the specific work that God commands us to work. Paul will subsequently affirm Jesus’ teachings when he states that “...faith worketh by love.” (Galatians 5:6) So, after we settle the issue of what to flee, and we begin to focus on what to follow, a working, vibrant, active faith becomes the obvious goal that Paul sets before us. Contrary to the popular view here described, our active faith does not secure our eternal salvation (The Lord Jesus Christ, the object of our faith, fully accomplished our eternal salvation), but it does indeed make us fruitful and faithful, richly blessed as we serve God in the here and now.

4. *...love....* Biblical love is not a mushy, morally blind sentimentality. Some New Testament Greek dictionaries define the word most often translated as “love” in our King James Bible as “...love in a social or

moral sense.” Thus, at its heart, this word requires a moral and a social love, not a blind love.

...to have love for someone or something, based on sincere appreciation and high regard—to love, to regard with affection, loving concern, love.<sup>3</sup>

Biblical love requires a specific kind of action from us. Take note that Paul’s most complete definition of love to be found in Scripture (First Corinthians 13) defines love by a series of actions, not by a list of emotions. “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” (John 14:15) We cannot measure our love for the Lord by our feelings; only by our actions. When Paul taught the most central truth of New Testament Christianity, he defined Jesus’ love for us, not by how Jesus felt, but by what He did. (Romans 5:7-8) If the people around you were to judge your love for the Lord solely by what you do, what would they conclude? How much would they believe that you love Him?

5. ...*patience*.... Take the time to study the New Testament’s use of two words, “patience” and “longsuffering.” You’ll discover an informative pattern. When New Testament writers address our need to be kind toward people, they use “longsuffering.” When they teach us regarding our reaction to life’s situations, to circumstances that we dislike, they use “patience.” Paul here instructs us to take control of how we react to the situations we face in life. Do not permit the unpleasant events of your life to define and to control you. Engage your faith—follow it—so that you react to it out of godly grace, not out of narcissistic frustration. Ouch! This “Follow” direction from Paul hits hard at all of us.

6. ...*meekness*. Meekness in Scripture is not the equivalent of a Marvin Milk-Toast, timid soul. Scripture uses this term to describe Moses. Think of Moses before Pharaoh. Think of him as he urged the Israelites to leave Egypt and to follow him into the desert. Think of him when he came down from the mountain and discovered the people, disappointingly led by Aaron, involved in idolatry. I rather suggest that Biblical “meekness” refers to our faithful obedience to God in the face of great obstacles and opposition. When we try to

balance God and the devil in our lives, we, first of all, will tear ourselves in two, but we’ll also begin to look for excuses, carnal rationalizations, to justify one compromise to our faith after another. In short, we’ll destroy that quality of Biblical meekness; we’ll actually become more like the “Marvin Milk-Toast” than different from him.

Paul has here given us six concise, specific behaviors to follow. How much of your time would you suppose these six behaviors might consume? How much time might be left over for other pursuits if you faithfully follow these? Ah, now we are getting to the heart of true, authentic New Testament Christianity. This kind of living helps to make our church the kind of “House” that God delights to dwell in. Let’s work to make our church, ever and always, a place where He delights to dwell.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church  
16434 Woodruff  
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
Pastor

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<sup>3</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., 292 (New York: United Bible societies, 1996).