

# 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)

Many Christians in our day apparently believe that any activity that we accurately describe as "Fight" must be avoided at all cost. This imbalanced idea leads them to a skewed view of the faith. It imperils their spiritual health and maturity. New Testament writers frequently borrow from first century military words and actions as they frame those analogies and apply them to the faith. Robert Frost wrote a fascinating poem, "Mending Wall," in which he describes a conversation with a neighbor. The neighbor is busily building a fence around his property. When Frost asked the neighbor why he was erecting the fence, the neighbor responds, "Good fences make good neighbors." As Frost ponders this idea in the poem, he raises a number of valid questions. Why the fence? What does its builder want to keep out of his property? What does he want to keep in his property? Frost acknowledges that we inherently dislike walls. However, a world without walls would also inevitably be a world of chaos. Walls depict distinctions. Does Scripture teach that we are to make no distinction between sin and righteousness? Between Christ and Belial? (2 Corinthians 6:15)

However, we should rightly ask questions as we investigate the New Testament's application of the military analogy to our faith. If we do not understand the nature of the conflict that we face, and the enemy who opposes our faith and our God, we may unknowingly give that enemy our sword when we should be swinging it at him.

1. Whom should I fight?
2. What should I fight?
3. How should I go about this noble fight?
4. What strategies must I avoid in my fight?

Many of us who have spent years in the faith have at some time seen very sincere Christian people who truly believed they were right and were opposing grave error, but they resorted to tactics that were as equally sinful and unbiblical as the error they opposed. Simply stated, two wrongs do not make a right. We must never leave the battleground where righteousness and sin face off. Inevitably we stand on one or the other side of this conflict; know it or not. An ignorant soldier may be

the most dangerous weapon on the battlefield **for the enemy.**

In our study passage, Paul directs Timothy—and us—to "Fight the good fight of faith...." I suggest that quite often our greatest single adversary in this fight is the fellow—or lady—we see in the mirror, ourselves. Jesus' primary emphasis on denying self and on bearing our cross leaves no doubt that our greatest obstacle to faithful obedience is self, not some cantankerous Christian who always creates interference to our good intentions.

When Jesus instructed the disciples to "Strive to enter in at the strait gate..." He used the same Greek word that Paul used in our study passage for "Fight." (Luke 13:24; this passage does not teach hell-bound sinners how to gain entrance into heaven. It rather teaches struggling Christians how to enter into a life of godly faith, to "Fight the good fight of faith....")

Jesus told Pilate that His followers had no military designs against Rome. They were not political insurrectionists.

Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence. (John 18:36, KJV 1900)

Here we find an excellent study tension. Jesus teaches that His servants would not take up arms to intervene in Pilate's trial of Jesus. But Paul clearly directs Timothy to fight a different kind of battle. How do we apply both passages to our faith-walk?

Paul uses this same word again; the word translated by "striving" in the following passage:

Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily. (Colossians 1:29, KJV 1900)

We see the same word again later in Colossians, "...laboring fervently...."

Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. (Colossians 4:12, KJV 1900)

Quite a contrast, Paul uses this word in conjunction with God's inner workings in us and prayer. Do we pray with embarrassed timidity, or do we go boldly, though always with reverence to our God, to the throne of grace? (Hebrews 4:16)

And finally we see the word in Paul's "Swan song."

I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. (2 Timothy 4:7, KJV 1900)

The word may rightly describe a military conflict, but it may also apply equally to an intense and focused commitment to something that we deem "Worth fighting for."

Let's add one more passage to our study.

*Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. (Ephesians 6:10-13, KJV 1900)*

Especially in, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood..." Paul takes us nicely down the path to answer our questions. Let's revisit those questions.

1. **Whom should I fight?** Paul answers this question in the Ephesians passage cited above. Our enemy is not an errant brother or sister, but rather the forces rallied around our arch-adversary, "...the wiles of the devil." However, such an errant believer can fall so deeply into error, and allow himself to be so fully used by the great deceiver as to become a real enemy to the faith. "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, **that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ.**" (Philippians 3:18 KJV; **emphasis added**) Our primary adversary is Satan and his allies, be they willing accomplices or ignorant tools in his hands. In the personal closing of his letters, Paul often adds noble commendations to faithful allies, but he also includes pointed revelations regarding some who, though at one time profitable allies had changed their minds and their course of life, so that they became major hindrances to the cause of God and of truth. The believer who naively refuses to confront error, and those in error, fails his charge to be a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

***You don't consort with the enemy and at the same time credibly claim to be a faithful soldier of Jesus Christ.***

2. **What should I fight?** The honorable Christian battle targets the influence of Satan where ever it appears. Do not overlook the military analogy. The soldier who never engages in any action other than defense shall eventually lose the battle. The effective soldier takes the battle to the enemy. He takes the offensive. We clearly see this point in our study passage, "Fight the good fight of faith..." In taking the offensive, good Christian soldiers affirm the truth of the gospel and actively live out its tenets in their personal conduct. We see this point in the context of our study passage in terms of the inordinate devotion to money and the consequences that misplaced affection always impose on people. Given our natural humanity, we all would enjoy the luxuries of "The good life," but many of us might fall prey to its alluring pleasures. They took Solomon down. Are we stronger than he? Whether in personal appetites or in actively contending for the faith, a faithful soldier takes the offensive.
3. **How should I go about this noble fight?** When we step onto the Christian battlefield, we must keep constantly in mind that we are one soldier. We are not the commander-in-chief. We serve under another, and we are therefore obligated to follow His orders, not make up the rules for ourselves. Spend time pondering each of the weapons that Paul describes in Ephesians 6:10-13. Paul gives us everything we need to engage the battle with honor under the command of the Captain of our salvation. Wield no other weapons. ***Use these weapons, and use them according to the instructions of Him who gave them to you.***
4. **What strategies must I avoid in my fight?** When we interact with people who have become ensnared by Satan's deceitful tactics, we must be prepared for underhanded and unethical tactics. When the soldier of Satan attacks us with a "Low blow," our first inclination is to strike back in kind. Wrong! Never compromise your ethics or your commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. Did He, even one time, ever abandon His righteous dignity and respond to Satan with Satan's black methods? Never! Not even one time. He serves as our example. He is our Commander-in-chief. He calls out the orders of battle. Always go to Scripture and keep the rules of engagement that Scripture teaches fresh and clear in your mind.

We'll study this topic further.

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Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
Pastor