

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

The Apostle Paul admonishes Bishop Timothy to do two things: flee, and pursue. Fleeing and pursuing are opposites. To flee you run away. To pursue you run toward. The Apostle presents a choice, a choice for Timothy, a choice for you.

Timothy is a Christian, saved by God's grace through faith in the Christ that he preached and taught. In that he is very much like you. He can choose. He has a free will. Before his conversion his will, like your will, was bound. He couldn't choose. He could only sin.

But as a Christian, now he has a choice. He can do as Isaiah teaches of Immanuel, the Virgin's Son – that He know to refuse the evil and choose the good. And so can every Christian. So can you. You are baptized. You can choose. You can say "No" to sin.

You know what is good. God is good. He is love and life and light. He is the source of your faith and life. To choose Him, to choose the things that He ordains and gives, is to choose the good. So the Apostle lists the good things to choose: righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. These the Christian is to pursue. This is the Way of Life, the road that leads to salvation. To walk this road is a journey to heaven.

But the Apostle also lists things from which to flee. For they are the road to death. Flee the desire to be rich. He doesn't say to flee riches, God alone gives them. God's Gifts are good. If you receive them in thanksgiving, use them to the Glory of God, and use them to the benefit of neighbor, they are good gifts. The Apostle doesn't say flee riches. He says flee the desire to be rich. That is the temptation, the snare, that snags men and casts them into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.

These snares are so strong that they can bring even those of faith into temptation. The Apostle writes that some have strayed from the faith, and pierced themselves with many sorrows. Perhaps you know how this feels. Perhaps in a moment of jealousy, a moment of anger, or lust, or pride, you have let the snares of your fallen flesh overtake you. It is safe to say that you have.

But the fruits of that temptation to sin, the fruits of yielding to temptation, never satisfy. Sin never delivers what it promises. That's how sin is. It seems to offer you the very thing you need to be happy, the very thing you need at the moment. But in fact it never fulfills. That shiny package is empty. It brings only sorrow and pain. It never satisfies.

Sin hurts you. Sin hurts those around you. It is the choice that leads to death, the way of sorrow. It is the road that enslaves, the road that prevents you from choosing. It is the road that binds your will to only and always oppose God, the road of many foolish and harmful lusts.

So the Apostle urges Timothy to keep his commandment without spot, blameless. He urges him to flee these things, and pursue righteousness. St. Paul was no Pelagian. He was not urging Timothy to engage in decision theology. Timothy was a Christian. You are too. You can choose. You have that power in your baptism. The death of Christ sets you free. He Himself took your infirmities and bore your sicknesses.

Baptism makes His forgiveness your forgiveness. In the font His death and resurrection are washed into you. In Christ your sins are forgiven, even the sin of giving in to temptation, of yielding to lust, of greed, pride and hard-heartedness. Baptized into Christ all your sins are removed, washed away, forgiven, lifted off of you.

But God does not leave you empty. He gives you faith, faith that trusts in Christ. And that faith, saving faith, faith that avails unto eternal life, is worked in you by God the Spirit. He calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies you.

The Gospel Word is the Means by which the Spirit works, the same Gospel that faith confesses. So St. Paul writes "Fight the good fight of faith," and that faith He links to confession, the good confession, which is to confess Christ.

God has saved you from destruction and perdition. He has saved you from harmful lusts and foolish desires. In Christ He gives you contentment, true contentment, for godliness with contentment is great gain. That is true wealth. We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

So true riches are not found among the things of this world, this world which perishes and soon will pass away. True riches are eternal. True riches are found in the things of God: faith, comfort, peace, contentment, love and forgiveness.

So Paul urges before God, who gives life to all things, and before Christ, who Himself gave witness to the Good confession before Pilate when He confessed Himself to be King, before Father and Son, Paul urges that his commandment be kept, his commandment to flee transgression and pursue righteousness, which is to draw nigh unto Christ. Drawing nigh unto Him, the riches of heaven are yours.

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