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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Wednesday evening 12 December 1928

1 TIMOTHY 6 v 12

"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"

How many of you have been engaged today in a fight of faith with respect of this service, seeking the blessed presence and power and love and blood of God, against reason, against spiritual idleness? Well, it may just have been, we shall go; hope it will be a good sermon. You are here; a good sermon you won't hear, but may God grant there may be a good gospel preached. Eternity is coming, we are hastening to it. Are we fit to enter it? That is a great question? It may have been settled in some of your consciences and yet fresh guilt may have made, may now be making, that settlement questionable to you. You may have had the presence of God and have lost it, walked in love and left your love, received the word of God and let it slip, have walked with God and then turned your back on Him. There are many things to divert the attention of the believer. Things in himself, love of money, worldly mindedness, carnality, strong disposition against God, hardness of heart, unthankfulness for countless mercies. And these, being displeasing to God, will have wrought what you may now be feeling, a cloud, a darkness, and there may be a reasoning with respect to past experience. There may be in some - the Lord knows it is so with some - a strange bias to infidelity, and that abomination rises again and again. The Apostle exhorts us against such and such sins and, gathering them up as it were into an army, he says, now fight, fight these enemies. They stand between you and heaven, fight them. They destroy peace in your conscience, fight them. They tell you there is no heaven to go to, fight them. They may say the Bible is not true, they may deny its inspiration in your heart; fight these enemies. Providence may be on their side, apparently. It may say God is not kind to you, He does not watch over you kindly. He lets the wind of temptation blow fiercely in your

face, making movement forward all but impossible. "Fight the good fight of faith" Providence may be kind - it is indeed so, but specially perhaps in some - so as that nature says now take rest, all is well. You may build on this. My dear friends is there a position in this world in which you can say that providence, taken nakedly and alone, that will help you to heaven, help you to take a single step in the way of life? I think I may say boldly, No, not one single thing. If you are comfortable, go to sleep you will, according to nature. If they are troublesome, then rise up and fret, according to nature. May the Lord help us to regard this great word, this important exhortation - "Fight the good fight of faith".

The first obvious remark is this, that you cannot fight the good fight of faith if you have not faith. Have you faith? "Hast thou faith?" That is the great thing. Faith - it is the gift of God. "By grace are ye saved through faith and that" (the faith) "not of yourselves; it is the gift of God". "God hath opened the door of faith to the Gentiles". Faith created by God has an Object. Never rest in an entirely subjective religion; you must have an Object. An objective religion is connected with a subjective religion that is saving. Faith is a persuasion on adequate evidence. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for". Faith looks to its Creator - God. Without it you can never please God, can never approach Him. "Without faith it is impossible to please Him for he that cometh to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him". Luther says, faith is a knowledge, and you will find it difficult to separate faith and knowledge, for what you know, you believe, and you believe what you know. If we do not know God in any way, we do not believe in Him, and the measure of knowledge of God is the measure of faith. Faith, as Bunyan says, acts in two manner of ways. It walks as long as it can, and when it can walk no longer it cries "Lord save or I perish". You may know in some way whether you have faith or not. If you have faith God is real to you, at any rate, at times. Sin is real, holiness is real. Sin is poison; holiness is a delightful element. Where faith is, if you have faith, you want God, cannot do without Him, would not if you might. "O God, my God, early will I seek Thee", is the language of a believing man. "As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after Thee O God" is the language of a living, believing man. If you have faith

you worship. Whenever God draws near you will believe in Him and fall flat on your face, as Abraham did, and worship. If you get a view of the glory of God, then your comeliness, your natural comeliness turns into corruption and you fall down. You do as John did - "I fell at His feet as dead". God's presence kills nature in the wickedness of it. O it is a great thing to have faith. Better to have faith in God in all nakedness, with no earthly support, than possess all the gold in all the mines and banks of the world. A naked faith going out to a living God enriches the soul. It is wealth indeed. Have we faith? I remember when I had none and I remember how it came first. You can do the same. When God speaks then the sinner believes. When God shines then the sinner sees Him and believes. "Dost thou believe on the Son of God? Who is He Lord that I might believe? Thou hast both seen Him and He it is that talketh with thee. And he fell down and worshipped Him". "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? Who art Thou Lord? I am Jesus", and Paul, called Saul of Tarsus, became from that moment a believer. "What shall I do to be saved?" said the Jailor. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ", and he became a believer. Manifestation of God in some way is the beginning of faith, the creation of faith in a sinner's heart, and that faith always will be going out to Him, always going to yourself and saying O what a sinner you are, and then looking to the Lord Jesus for salvation. It will be ever crying death and emptiness upon yourself and ever be speaking friendly of God, giving a good report of Him. He is all you need, all you can ask. He has more than you can receive. A believer is a miracle. A believer gets hold of God sometimes. A believer says to God - "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me". He has power over the angel and prevails. A believer sometimes looks on unseen things and closes his eyes to seen things, and long troubles are momentary and eternal things are present with him. "Our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory". That was not a speculation. You think of it; that was not a speculation; it was knowledge. "While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen, for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." O believer you are a miracle of God's eternal love and the operation of the Holy Spirit. And sometimes the believer sees in his trouble no means, no second causes, but just God. "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the Name of the Lord." Faith, if

I may use the word, sometimes, as in the case I have just quoted, namely Job, takes a short cut and gets away from all means and second causes and says just that the Lord has done it. "Shall there be evil in a city and the Lord hath not done it?" The rod speaks to the wise man who hears it. Faith - a knowledge; faith - a worshipping grace; faith - the faith that the Puritans used to speak of as the faith of adherence which is not, though the same spirit, is not exactly the same thing as full assurance. "Lord entreat me not to leave Thee", and his heart is just like that, cleaving to the Lord, adhering to Him. O the limpet that faith is; how it cleaves to the Rock. What a mercy it is to have faith. Have we faith? We have religion, of course we have. Have we faith? Have we the Object of faith before us from time to time? Do we believe in God? The older I get the more this great Object is to me. When I was a young man it was not the same exactly as it is now. The Object, O what an Object. I am hoping to see Him ere long without the weary veil of the flesh and while here I want to see Him by faith. "Whom having not seen ye love". That is connected with faith. Abraham believed and it was counted to him for righteousness. He believed that his seed should be as the stars on which he was told to look, though he had not a son. Faith laughs, as it is said, at impossibilities. "To him that believeth all things are possible". The death of all enemies is possible, the resurrection of the body, the entrance of the soul and eventually of the body into heaven, all possible to faith, whereas to reason and to feeling, depressed feeling, well, nothing is possible. Now the Apostle says that he knew this faith had been in the grandmother of Timothy and in Eunice his mother, and that it was also in himself - this faith. And as it were, he says, now my son, do not expect to sail to heaven. Between you and victory - that is heaven - are innumerable enemies, and do not lie down - fight. "Fight the good fight of faith".

Now let us look a little, as enabled, at this fight. It is a fight. Buckle on thy heavenly armour, O believer. Every step of the way more or less distinctly that you take will be opposed. The aim of the serpent, who was permitted to enter Eden and overcome Adam, the aim of that serpent is just the same with respect to every believer, namely to destroy him. Christ was sent to destroy the works of the devil and one day - and that may be shortly with some - He will bruise Satan under the believer's feet, but it wont be without a fight. Let

us look then at this, and first of all you have got to fight against self. That is the enemy of the child of God. If a man deny not himself he cannot be Christ's disciple. He has got to fight against his love. If he love father, mother, brother, sister, husband, wife, house and land more than Christ, he is not worthy of Christ; he is not the disciple of Christ. If he loves money, he has that love to fight against. If his nature is not a clean nature, he has that lust to fight against. If he is intensely worldly - and some of God's people are- that has to be combatted, resisted. O this self. How I have sympathised with Rutherford in that exclamation of his - "O that I had not a myself". This myself, ever standing up, ever resisting, ever moving, ever fighting against faith, and against God, and against the interest of the soul. And then, this love of ease. The wise virgins slept as well as the foolish virgins. "It is high time" says Paul "that we awake out of sleep", the sleep of ease, the love of ease. It is high time, he said, that we should arise and wake that Christ might give us light. Now believer, you have got this self, I have got this self; this dear self, as one might speak; this wicked self, this unbelieving self, this unclean self, this covetous self, this idolatrous self - we have got it. Do you know him? His vile features, his dreadful movements? Now says Paul, fight. Flee youthful lusts, flee the love of money, flee the things of this world and follow after righteousness. "Fight the good fight of faith". In a battle there is always one thing desired, and that is the death of the enemy. Have you that before you, the death of your enemy? Patch up no inglorious peace. The death of the enemy - what an enemy. Ceaseless in his activity, ever, ever moving, plotting, designing, resisting, blaspheming. You know, you can fill up for yourselves the particulars of your own cases. Now see, is this before you, the death of this enemy? O I shall lose him when I die, one may say. Yes, that is true, in a sense very true, and if the believer says it, it is blessedly true. But there is this in the way, this warfare. We are called to fight, we are called to fight, and hence that wonderful word that I was reading just now - "Put on the whole armour of God". A man, yea an ignorant believer, very ignorant of himself at times, may say, I will overcome this, I wont do that. Why, the very speech tells that he is already defeated. But when a poor, weak believer, falls on his knees and in faith begs of God to overcome in him, to give faith to cleave to the atonement of Christ, to the righteousness of Christ, to

the love of God in Christ, asking the Lord to come to his help, then he is in the way to victory. O, this kneeling before God. How you may kneel when you are walking about your business. This kneeling before God - "Lord help me". Let us take one or two instances of it in the Scripture. You take now Jacob. Go back to your country, to your people, said God to him and he starts back with a good promise warm upon his spirit - "I will be with thee". He goes back. What sweet expectations he must have had in his heart, Obeying the Lord, he starts back, and in the way there comes an enemy, Esau with 400 men. Now faith goes its proper course; he called upon God. Jacob was left alone. He confesses that he is not worthy of the least of all the mercies and the truth that God has shown to him, but now he is on the way back as the Lord has directed him, but Esau is here. I fear him, he said, lest he should slay the mother and the little ones. Now his faith was favoured. God came, laid hold of Jacob and Jacob, in the strength that that imparted to him, laid hold of God and there was a wrestle. O what a faith he had: "I will not let Thee go". Do you know what that means? Faith does sometimes get so near and such hold of God as that you don't, cannot, let Him go, in that case. This is one of the secrets of vital religion. Nature is soon put out; faith holds on. "Fight the good fight of faith." If you can fight on your knees you will get victory. Do not fight with reason; that is a weapon that will not stand you in good stead. Do not fight with reason. "Fight the good fight of faith" with the sword of the Spirit, with the weapon of all prayer, with the breastplate of righteousness - justification; with the armour of light, showing you who can give you victory, and the weakness of your enemy. Thus fight. Jacob thus fought, and he got a blessing. It is written of him, "And He blessed him there", in his trouble; there where he wrestled; there where he prayed; there where he had courage - what Hart would call "daring" - to believe. There He, the Angel, blessed him. And you may go to some spot, some room, some place, and say, there He blessed me. I was down under the hand and heel of the enemy in my apprehension. I was afraid the end was come. I was afraid God was against me, but He helped me and I prayed and there He blessed me. Take David as another example of this. Look at his long trouble with Saul, the power of a king against him and he, a poor man, cast out, driven away from God's heritage. What an example of faith. What did he do? Lord, shall I go here? Lord, Saul I know is aware of my presence in Keilah. Will Saul come down to Keilah? He will, said

God. But David had some claim on this people. Will the men of Keilah deliver me into Saul's hand? They will, said God. O poor believer, follow the example if you can, as well as you can. Will it be so? Lord, tell thy servant; show me what to do. "Fight the good fight of faith". Take the Syrophenecian woman. O Lord my daughter is grievously tormented with the devil. Rutherford translates it - my daughter is grievously devilled. "It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs", said the Lord, and she fought the good fight of faith and got that straight, that wonderful commendation, "O woman great is thy faith". If you get hold of God, not even what seems to be a discouraging word from His own lips will put you off. There are many doubts as to whether it is so, that we get hold of God here and there, but if we really get hold of Him nothing will put us off. Eventually, we shall get the word "O woman great is thy faith". Faith will brave everything that comes against it. Three noble men would not bow to the image of gold set up on Dura's fiery plain, and they braved the furnace and not a smell of fire was on them. They fought the good fight of faith. Daniel's faith locked the lions' mouths. He fought the good fight of faith. So you find many examples of it in the Scripture. It is a wonderful grace - have you got it in exercise? This dreadful self. And in the next place, with respect to some dispensations of God's providence. He may try you a good deal. Peter says that the trial of faith is more precious than of gold that perisheth though it be tried with fire, and you will get a fire sometimes in God's providence. John got a fiery trial when he was put into prison and the Lord left him to languish there for a time, sending no message, not helping him in secret; just left him there for a time. So did he leave him, that John's faith seemed to give way, and in that particular frame of mind, he sent two of his disciples to Christ to ask Him if indeed He were the Christ. "Art Thou He that should come, or look we for another?" You may get very low; I have been very low many and many a time. It does not say you have got no faith if faith gets weak and feeble. John's faith was just strong enough to send to Christ and when you get very low there will be just enough strength to go to Christ - "Lord, help me". Have I been deceived? Help me, teach me. Then you remember Christ's word: "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me", who has faith to stand in the trial, to wait in the trial, to hang about Christ in the trial, not to let Him go at all. "Blessed is he whosoever shall

not be offended in Me". Now your circumstances may say, God is not with you. Maybe in your heart, as an argument against the goodness of your state before God, your circumstances may seem to say He has no care for you. He has left you to be buffeted just by the winds, by the tempter and by your own unbelief. Now here is a case - "Fight the good fight of faith". You need - we all, who have a little faith need - what Bunyan speaks about when the pilgrim was in the house of Mr Interpreter. He saw a fire and one was pouring water on the fire and yet it was not extinguished. But when he was taken to the backside of the fireplace he saw one pouring oil upon it, and the secret grace of God and the operations of the eternal Spirit keep faith alive. Though it is very tried it will go to God. Have you faith enough to go to Him? A mere professor's faith cannot live in trial; O it gives way. Demas hath forsaken me. Hymenaeus and others erred concerning the resurrection. Some trouble came and their faith failed. Now it is a great thing to have cleaving faith, a faith that moves after God. "Fight the good fight of faith". Perhaps I am speaking to one or more who, by their nature, are strongly disposed to infidelity. A corrupted reason works, infidelity is strengthened. Is there a God? Hath God said? O the pain of this, the anguish of this, none can know but the people who feel the same. 'Tis an awful thing to have an infidel disposition. As many of you as are not plagued with that, do thank God, and may you never, never come into it for it is a horrible thing to have that in your disposition. But God won't let this conquer. Sometimes He will send a word that will be such a searching word, showing the indignation of the Holy Ghost against that spirit, that the man with some such manifestation of God says, I believe. Sometimes a kind word, a word that touches the very spot, as when Christ said to Thomas - "Reach hither thy hand" and so on, will be given and the man falls down and says - "My Lord and my God". He fights, he overcomes in the strength of Christ. You will find this will be the case. If you are of this peculiarly wicked disposition God will give some manifestation of Himself so as that you will find your unbelief, your infidelity overcome again and again. Unbelief may work this way, against the Scriptures, against the promises of God, against the exhortations and precepts of the gospel. They seem, for a time, to have no authority. Now fight this, and beg of God again and again to grant there may be a powerful moving in your heart, enabling you to say, I believe. In the face of all the contradictions

of my heart, I believe in what He has said and said to me. O but it is difficult; I know it is a difficult way. You may have had many good things from God, and the devil of unbelief in your heart will make you question everything. Now to venture, to venture and say in the face of everything, I believe in God, that is fighting the good fight of faith. You may have to fight against many many suggestions respecting the Being of God. The majesty and the love and the pity and the kindness and the wisdom of God may all be contradicted in your mind. Now says Paul, give not way to this but "Fight the good fight of faith".

Notice one word, the word "good". It is not every battle that is good, but this is good. It is a good thing to have faith to cleave to God, to follow after Christ, to cleave to His righteousness, His atoning work, to cleave to the eternal love of the Father and to cleave to the Person and work of the Holy Ghost. It is good, good in itself, and good in the issue. Good in itself for it is a spirit on the side of God. Thine are we Jesus and on thy side thou son of Jesse is the language of poor believers who may be very weak in themselves. It is good in the issue. O the victory of faith, when after a struggle you can say, why the Lord is in my heart; I have been enabled to hold fast. Well what a mercy it is to have this good thing, this good fight. "Fight the good fight of faith"

"Lay hold on eternal life" and as Jesus Christ said "I am the life", and "I give to My sheep eternal life", to lay hold on eternal life is to lay hold on Him. No life out of Christ; no life out of Christ. Ah, sinner, you may find much death in yourself and God will let you feel it in order that you may prove this word, that Christ is life - "I am the life" - and that your faith may go in all its nakedness, and yet its divine strength, and lay hold of Him. You would not deny that there was a laying hold of Him in that confession - "Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God"; in that word "To whom shall we go, Thou hast the words of eternal life"; in that profession of the Psalmist where he said "My soul followeth hard after God". No movements of this kind can there be without faith. "Lay hold on eternal life". Look to the Lord with longing eyes; go with that cleaving faith, that God pleasing faith, that says against all the lies of the devil, I believe in Jesus Christ, in His Person, in His

work, and in those glorious words uttered on the cross - "It is finished". Ah a believer is a wonderful person after all. A weak, bruised reed in himself, yet he is a wonderful person because he holds fast to God. He holds fast to God, cannot let Him go. My disposition is against Him but I cannot let Him go; I cannot get on without Him. O says the believing heart "Lord I cannot do without Thee". Perhaps you can say sometimes every room in your house if it could speak would bear testimony to that, your heart is saying again and again Lord I cannot do without Thee. Many a corner in your house may say this; this poor sinner told the Lord over and over again and day after day he could not do without Him. And if a man can say that to God this may be said of that man, he shall not die for lack of Christ. If Christ gives you hunger for himself He will never let you die of that hunger but come Himself. He won't mock you with a stone; He won't put you off with a denial. "Lay hold on eternal life". Go to this blessed Jesus again and again and He will be sure to say sooner or later - Behold Me, behold Me, and then you will get where the church of old got - I found Him, I held Him fast and would not let Him go. And this laying hold on eternal life is not a simple thing, standing absolutely alone. It is the result of being called to it. Just think of it, called to this very life. "God is faithful by whom ye were called". Jesus called His disciples. You cannot imagine, if you do not know anything about it, the majesty of that voice - "Come unto Me"; "Follow Me". The voice of a mere man would have been, as it were, falling on a deaf ear, but the voice, the penetrating, powerful, teaching and attracting voice of the Saviour always is followed by obedience, called the obedience of faith. "Whereunto thou art also called". Faith in this young man's heart made him go after Christ, and faith in your heart, in my heart, will have the same way, the same result. We shall follow after. "Whereunto thou art also called". It is true of some even here that they professed a good profession before many witnesses. It is not true of all, but it may be true in such cases that they have made the profession even of a kind of necessity before one and another. Perhaps the friend of your bosom may have heard you say, O I wish the Lord were mine. I wish I had an enjoyed interest in Him, that my soul were lively, that I had a purified conscience by the blood of Christ. Well now, go on, follow on in that way. Do not hurry - God will hasten His work in His time - but go on in that way and profession, which especially you may make on

your knees again and again, saying - "I believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God", and that Thy blood, if applied to my conscience, would remove this load of dead works. I say that profession will bring forth in time the testimony of God, and then you will say, now I know and am persuaded, not only that there is a God in heaven, a Man, a God-Man in heaven, who loves me, but you will say now I would like to tell my friends who fear Him what He has done for my soul. Now my believing friends, may the Lord help you and help me, with you, to obey this word - "Fight the good fight of faith".

AMEN.