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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Wednesday evening 16 September 1925

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

The distinction between the church and the world is that the former has faith and the latter is without faith. Paul lays this down as an undoubted truth when he asks the people of God at Thessalonica to pray for him, that he may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men, for all men have not faith. The distinction lies here in a very vital manner. The distinction between the world and the church may not be very distinctly marked in some cases by belief in doctrine. A man may hold sound doctrine and have no faith, but a sinner cannot have faith wrought in him by the Holy Ghost and be dead and be in the world. It therefore would be, perhaps is in some of us, a very penetrating question whether we have faith; whether God has given to us that living principle which, though damped, can never die; which has for its great object and end, the living God; which empties the soul of self-satisfaction, makes it afraid of a shadow and seeks after reality; whether we have faith that brings us as sinners before the Lord in humble confession and with an eye to the Lord Jesus. If we have faith, we shall have trouble; we must fight. As Nehemiah said to his friends, and people on return to the land of promise - and they had to fight - fight for your wives, and your children, and your houses. So we, if we have faith, shall have to fight for ourselves, for our lives. "Fight the good fight of faith". Faith in the bleeding Lamb will keep your eye, and heart in the right direction. A fight means two parties with diverse and conflicting interests and, as neither will give way, the quarrel goes on and fighting has to be continued. Sin in you, in me, will not give way; it is determined to be the master; and faith, wherever it is, will not give in; it has before it a conquest, desires and seeks a victory, and as nature will not give in, I say there must be, there will be, fighting. These

interests are very diverse, very conflicting. The old man, with all his interests, seeks gratification of his lusts; rest in himself, pleasure in wickedness and not in God. The old man asks if there is a God; asks, if he should pray to God, supposing there is one, what profit there would be. He declares that he does not know the Lord. Pharaoh's spirit is alive in this chapel everywhere; I know not the Lord; What profit is there if I should pray to Him? And these interests of the old man I say again will persist and press themselves and never give in. And the new man has his interests; yes, faith has its great object, its source, and much desired end, even God. The Leader and Commander that the Father has given to the church, said in the Psalms "I have set the Lord alway before Me" and faith follows Him and sometimes it says "O God my heart is fixed, my heart is fixed I will sing and give praise". And these two dwell in the same house. How can there be peace between them? They fight for possession of the house. How can there be peace between them? They want different Gods; how can they agree? Self wants no other god but self; faith will have no God but the eternal God; and therefore there must be conflict. Sin says there is nothing in religion; it is but an opinion, a profession; and faith says there is a living God, God in heaven subsisting in three Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Sin delights in the mire and mud of iniquity; faith makes the soul say, I would be holy; I would fear God. And the Spirit by the Apostle speaks to Timothy the son of the Apostle Paul, and says "Flee youthful lusts" Go not after gold, set not your heart on this world; it is passing away, and, inasmuch as there is a goodly land for you to enter, fight for it. All opposers you must meet, all opposition must be beaten down and that wicked principle in you that will never give way must be crushed. But here is a difficulty. You may meet an enemy and by some means turn him into a friend, but when you have to deal with enmity the only thing to do is to kill him, and this is the trouble and here consists much of the warfare, that we have to deal with enmity itself. "The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Now real faith needs, and must have a constant supply of power. In other words, as the Apostle Paul puts it, it must stand in the power of God and not in the wisdom of men. His great aim in determining to know nothing among men but Jesus Christ and Him crucified, was this, that their faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God; that

they should not be persuaded that there was a God by any man, and that their faith should not be verified by human reasons, but the power of God; that power by which Jesus Christ was raised from the dead should be put forth and be exerted in these believing Corinthians, so that faith, though opposed, should not be overcome; their faith should look to the great end of it, even the possession of God and the inheritance reserved in heaven for every believer. This faith will never lead the possessor of it to pride and self-sufficiency. It will never unite with free-will; it will never allow to stand by the side of it human reason in its present state of corruption. Luther speaks of reason as a beast and says the beast reason must be killed, and every principle that is in us of sin through the fall is opposed to the exercises, as well as to the interests, of faith. Well, one may say to me, you make the way very difficult. I do not make it anything, I only state, or try to state, what the Lord says about this. Let us look a little at this great matter; faith - a persuasion in the mind on adequate evidence, that there is a God. Have we that? Faith on adequate evidence that God is incarnate, that Almighty God sighed human breath, that the Lord of Life experienced death. Have we that? Faith that we are sinners and both helpless and hopeless in respect of self, and the law and that faith is on very adequate evidence, for the law has come to some of us and killed us. Faith in the forgiveness of sins, in the acceptance of a sinner by God, in an open way to God, in a dear, a sufficient, gracious Saviour; in the fountain of His blood that cleanseth from all sin; in His righteousness that justifies the ungodly that believeth in Jesus. O what a faith; have we it? It is an opposition to sin. It is an opposition to the infidelity of our nature. And, inasmuch as faith is knowledge, it is an opposition to the ignorance of God that is in us by the fall. And this mighty principle, this believing, this knowing, this blessed faith, does not stand unopposed; it does not move unopposed. It is opposed at every step and the more godly a person is the more opposition he experiences. The more gracious we are, the more trouble we shall have, that is, the more conflict, for old sins, strong lusts, strong desires against what is godly are always provoked when faith is strong enough to believe and lay hold of eternal life. Lazy desires will kill the man if he have no faith, but if faith be in a sinner, then he will say sometimes "As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after Thee O God" Now with these two

armies there must be a battlefield, and that is the heart, that is within a sinner. "What will ye see in the Shulamite, as it were the company of two armies." And with their conflicting interests, with their determination, each being determined not to give way, but to gain the day, to get a victory, there cannot be anything but war and, says the Apostle "Fight the good fight of faith" Young Christians sometimes think that matters will get easier as they get older; at least it was so with me in earlier days. Now I find that getting nearer to Canaan, the land of promise, does not weaken the enemy, does not reduce him to obedience, and does not make him say, well I will give in, but he presses his case as always, urges the matter as he always has done, and so to the end - as Israel of old was to the end - is the child of God to be engaged. Why Paul the aged, when he came to the end, said, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course." The warfare soon was to end in an everlasting victory for his faith. This faith in the soul looks to the remedy for sin. A great point this, the remedy for sin. The remedy for sin is the Redeemer, the Person and the work of Christ. Thousands of fears fill the mind sometimes, much opposition to prayer, to secret prayer will be felt; opposition to searching the Scriptures and having them in your hand and eye and mouth, as the Lord said to Joshua; you will find much opposition. But, says the Apostle to Timothy in the second Epistle: "My Son be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus". Now that strength does not lie only, and always - perhaps not very often - in a triumphant cry. It lies very much in labour, labour to get near to the Lord, labour to be right, labour to have the testimony, the witness, of the Holy Ghost in your soul, to have the blood of Jesus Christ sprinkled on your conscience, and to enter into that rest that remaineth to the people of God. This is much of secret work. As the voice of Christ was not heard in the street, so the labour and fight of faith will not be visible to your friends always, seldom perhaps, but it will be visible to Him who is the Captain and the Leader and the Commander and who says, stand still, the battle is not yours, but the Lord's. Be not afraid. Say unto the people, said the Lord to Moses, say unto the people that they go forward, and so faith must struggle. It struggles in two ways, as I a little know. It struggles against the opposition it meets with. If you yield to sin always it is one of the saddest proofs you can ever afford that you are without faith. But if you have faith you will certainly oppose what comes against

your progress in the divine life, and that, as I have said, will be much in secret. "O that I knew where I might find Him". Unless you have that cry in your heart, you can have no understanding of the divine power that is behind that cry, that is, so to speak, the fountain of that cry. "O that I knew where I might find Him". And sin and Satan, these stand in the way and oppose; sometimes will work so subtly that you will scarcely realise that there is an enemy at work, but you will be feeling an indisposition and then, from indisposition to opposition, and so you yield for a time to the enemy, but when faith is in real exercise, the fight is in this direction, meeting opposition, struggling against it. O that I knew where I might find the Lord; that I might come to His seat. There - if I could once get there - I would order my speech before Him, I would fill my mouth with arguments, and I would know what He would say unto me. I would understand what He would answer me. This is the thing, this is the struggle of faith against the opposition. Hinder me not, I will go with this man says Rebekah, and the sinner says I will go to God; my exceeding joy I desire to find Him to be and I will go to Him. Says the enemy, you shall not. Here is the conflict and this is one direction in which the fight of faith will be known in your heart. And the other direction is this, you will be looking to and strongly, at times, crying for the sustenance of your Captain. He never faints, He is never discouraged. We faint, we get discouraged but He comes, sends a word, sends help from the sanctuary, and causes the sinner to keep Christ in view in all he does. And in these two things respecting the fight you will find yourselves engaged from time to time, you who have faith. What a great blessing it is to possess this faith. Fight, says the Apostle. The interests of faith are very great. The interests of faith are first to find and enjoy God. God is both findable and enjoyable, and if you have faith you believe that, and believing it you seek it. You will seek Him. "My soul" says a believer "thirsteth for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God". And when you find Him, that is get access to Him at any time, you will find yourself much engaged then in laying before Him your whole case and seeking, as Bunyan speaks, seeking the conduct of and the protection of Mr Great-heart, that He may go with you all through; seeking that the Lord would take up your case, manage it for you, and manage you; that He would open His hand and supply your every need; that He would cover you with His feathers,

and cause you to abide in His secret place. And this is not easy. People may think - people who have no faith do think - it is quite an easy thing to believe, but people with faith, who have the gates of hell against them, and all the power of the devil exercised at times, they find it difficult to believe and difficult to cast their burden on the Lord, and if they do for a time cast it on Him they find themselves, as it were, taking it up again, so difficult is this great matter of faith. Can I find God says a poor sinner then? He feels so ignorant he is afraid he shall never find Him. Then he has such opposition that he is ready at times to give in. Says one, a believer, I have been seeking for pardon and assurance for a long time, and I have not found; what am I to do? Then the enemy says, do not seek any longer; and what has faith to do here? To oppose the wicked suggestion, to oppose the devil who, being hopeless himself, tries to breath hopelessness and despair into a believer's heart. Now faith sometimes in the conflict will catch at that word "Wait on the Lord, be of good courage and He shall strengthen your heart. Wait I say on the Lord." "Wait", that does not seem difficult to some, but with condemnation in your conscience, with sin and lust in your heart, with the enemy opposing you, with many suggestions that you will never get what you are seeking, what you are waiting for, with, what Solomon speaks of, a deferred hope making the heart sick, this is difficult indeed. "Wait on the Lord", "Wait on the Lord", "Fight the good fight of faith". Never give in, never yield to the enemy. The interest of faith is Christ Himself; that is the great interest of the sinner, Christ Himself. Faith says, without union with Him there cannot be acceptance with God. Without His blood there cannot be purity of conscience. Without His love shed abroad in the heart there can be no true conception of divine love, no enjoyment of it. Without the sense of Christ's righteousness there can be no comfort in justification, however clear the doctrine may appear to be. The interest of faith, that is, of the sinner, is in the Lord Jesus. And this is quite clear in the Scripture and I do not doubt it is clear to some of you; quite clear in Scripture, for this is said: "It pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell" Now the mind gets scattered, thoughts are scattered and many interests seem to come and conflict with this great interest, and faith's labour, faith's struggle, faith's fight, is to press toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ. Paul had this; he tells us about it in the

Philippians as being his own experience, that the things that were interesting, valuable to him, as a man, a Jew, a scholar, all the things that were of great interest to him he counted but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord for whom he had suffered the loss of all things and did count them but dung that he may win Christ. Now if you have this faith it will only stand in God's power. It can only labour in the light and strength of the Holy Spirit and you will, many and many a time, feel an awe on your heart as you realise what you are engaged in, realise what you are seeking, and that, without finding that great Object, you are undone for ever. Faith's interest is getting the Lord's notice; that great word in Numbers pronounced by the high priest, by Aaron: "The Lord bless thee and keep thee. The Lord lift up the light of His countenance upon thee and be gracious to thee". Now that wonderful blessing is what every child of God longs for. Is the Lord interested in me? How often I have asked that question. How fully it has covered my case in my view. Can He take an interest in such a sinner? Now faith's struggle is to find this, both in respect of grace and providence. In respect of grace, faith wants communications. "Be not silent to me". Speak to my soul, take notice of me. But faith will labour at this point. If you were labouring for twenty, or thirty, or forty years for this point and did not get it until the end, you would say when you got it, it was worth waiting for, to know the Lord has a loving interest in me; that the Saviour came from heaven to die for and save me; that the Spirit came from heaven into my heart to make me hunger and thirst after God. It is worth waiting for. And then too, things in providence. Is the Lord interested in you? Said Moses to the Lord: "Wherein shall it be known here that I and Thy people have found grace in Thy sight? Is it not in that Thou goest with us?" Is it not in that Thou dost hear us in all that we call upon Thee for? Is it not then in providence, as well as in grace, that faith wants this great interest making out? Faith in the bleeding Lamb is wonderful, and faith in the bleeding Lamb as having all things in His hand; all providences, the hearts of kings, rivers and waters in the hollow of His hand and wind in His fist. Men's hearts, everything, your circumstances, your difficulties, your blessings, all in the hand of this gracious Lord, and faith's great object is to find this out. If He is in your troubles, the troubles lose all their bitterness. If He drops His mercy into your cup, all the bitter ingredients are gone out of it,

even though there is great bitterness to your nature. If He is with you to carry your cross, nay carrying your cross and you also, then you say "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" Then you can say "Thy kingdom come Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." You will never shake your head at providential things if you have faith. There will be a power at times in you, in your faith, that will make providence exceedingly solemn to you and you will fear taking a single step without knowing that God will have you take it. "Fight the good fight of faith" And in this fight there is a good deal of opposition, a double opposition. An opposition to it and opposition against the opposition, and this the child of God is more or less sensible of from time to time. Why the devil and your own heart will try to make an infidel of you and faith says, there is a God in heaven; that God I will seek unto; and here these two come into very powerful opposition at times, for when God strengthens your faith it wont give in, it will never yield; neither will it patch up an inglorious peace; no. "Fight the good fight of faith" then in seeking an interest, seeking to know that you have an interest in God, and that God has an interest in you, for if He should say of you, "I will guide thee with My eye", and if He should say it to you, you will commit your way to Him, and then in fear and trembling you will look to Him to be guided, to be supported, and to be supplied even to the very end.

"Fight the good fight of faith" against all carnal security. Carnal security is that state of mind that would cause, and where it prevails, does cause the person to rest in himself and what he has. And this prevents him -if God the Holy Spirit does not prevent it - working another way, it prevents him from seeking God. Now a living faith wont have this security; it cannot rest in it. You may be secure for a time if you have real faith, because the Lord speaks of the virgins, both wise and foolish, sleeping and slumbering, but wherever this faith is in exercise it will keep you from sleeping and slumbering. It will keep you awake seeking God. I will get me to my tower, I will stand upon my watch, and see what the Lord shall say unto me and what I shall answer when I am reproved of Him. That is not carnal security. This faith keeps the soul secured enough but makes it not secure. Well, do you know what this means? Running water is sweet; stagnant water is not. And if your souls be stagnant for a

time, your faith being, as it were, poisoned by the poison of sin and nature, you will find that you are content without God. But whenever your faith is revived and drawn up toward Him, you are not content without Him; you must have Him. And even this "must have God" is opposed for the enemy will say that is presumption. Everything to keep you from seeking God and from persisting in your cry. O but the Lord knows how to keep us at this business and He is not unrighteous to forget the labour of love and patience of hope in Him when faith is in exercise. Be afraid of security. Toplady sings, and we, some of us, have sung also with him

But more the treacherous calm I dread
Than billows bursting o'er my head

Of all the things we should dread, this is one we should most dread, carnal security. Security in your profession, especially if it is a long one. Security in your friends, especially if they are godly. Security in your naked knowledge of the Scriptures, security in the Church. All kinds of things may come and contribute, for the time, to this carnal security, but whenever faith gets, again and again, a new life and fresh energy put into it by the Spirit, then it moves after God; never can be content without Him, and a blessing it is. I am not content myself in these my last days; I do want God to come to me, to be with me, and perhaps there is scarcely ever a night when I am not awake in some part of it, concerned about the Lord and my own soul with respect to, not only eternity, but the remaining days of my time on earth.

"Fight the good fight of faith" then in the next place with respect to your passage through the desert, the wilderness. The wilderness gave plenty of scope for faith whenever it was in exercise and there was in God plenty to draw it out and encourage it and supply it. No sowing, no reaping, no buying, no trading in the wilderness. Bread could not be bought; God rained it from heaven. And in the wilderness you will find in a spiritual sense there is an answering to all that kind of experience that Israel had in the wilderness. They needed God; the necessity that is stamped on nature, indelibly stamped on it. The same kind of necessity every child of God feels himself, and after the Spirit there is a necessity. He must have

things from God. If you are in the wilderness you may be threatened with death. Hunger and thirst threatened Israel but their God was equal to their necessity and He sent them bread from heaven and brought water to them out of the flinty rock. "Fight the good fight of faith". Now this faith has one characteristic, this namely - and I am sure you will believe it, you will know it for yourselves, those of you who have faith - it will never hear and entertain a false report of God; never listen patiently to anything that the devil and unbelief and the world may have to say against God. Faith says, He is right. In all circumstances whenever faith is strong enough to assert itself and make its voice heard in the heart, it always says God is right. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" And can the Redeemer be unkind, and can the Spirit neglect to bless a sinner for whom Christ shed His blood, and can providence be unkind? Adverse it may be; can it be unkind? and can the issue of it be anything but good? Now an unbelieving heart says exactly the opposite. Faith says I do not believe it. I have admired Paul's noble words when the ship was about to be broken to pieces, and he knew it. He said "I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me". Well brethren it is a wonderful testimony; the nobility, the spiritual blessedness of it, I have admired many and many a time, and wish to say it. "I believe God". The waves say, it is destruction; the soldiers counselled to kill all the prisoners, and everything conspired to say this will be the end of us all, but God had told Paul the other way. He had said, I have given thee all them that sail with you and Paul said, I believe Him. God said to Abram look at the stars and count them if you can. "So shall thy seed be", and Abram believed God. The prophet went to Jehoshaphat who had said to the Lord he did not know what to do, but his eyes were to Him. Then the prophet said while you are with God, God is with you; now go forth. And Jehoshaphat set the music before them; the warrior, he would have them sing as they went out to battle, sing of victory. Moses said to the people, go forward. And so faith will listen to no evil report of God. It pains a gracious heart to hear a word spoken against God. When you have to fight for the doctrine of the cross, when it is contradicted, faith receives the word of contradiction, as it were, with a real grief and pain and indignation and protests and says, God is right. The truth is right, the doctrine is right, and all is right.

"Fight the good fight of faith" with respect to the end. What an end. How soon the place that knows us now will know us no more. It is written: "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord". You have very likely often your end before you - what will it be? You may picture your dying bed to yourself sometimes, and the enemy says you have made plenty of trouble for yourself by your inconsistency; you have provided many a thorn for your dying pillow. You have provided a good deal of work for your conscience when you come to the end, if not before, and an honest man says it is too true. And what will faith say? "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth from all sin". And this is not held without opposition. You will never hold Christ in peace while the devil is allowed to come near you. You will never hold His righteousness without dispute, as long as the enemy is permitted to dispute it. But then faith is to fight. Hold fast; remember how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast. O Timothy keep that which is committed unto thee. And though that refers to his ministry and the gift of God in that particular, yet it may be addressed to the Lord's people, all of them - keep what is committed, keep it; it is your life. Can you give it up. When the enemy disputes a promise, can you give it up? When he says, you are wrong, can you believe that without any exercise and trouble? Do not you seek the Lord and go to Him. Lord if I am wrong put me right. O do make me right for eternity. Faith must go forward, it must fight, it is given to fight. It is given to believe in God; it is given to hold a sinner fast in a time of trouble; it is given so that the sinner must go to Him from whom his faith came.

"Lay hold on eternal life". This is clear; it is quite clear in the Scripture what this eternal life is. Said the Lord Jesus: "I am the life". "I give unto My sheep eternal life". "I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly" Now says the enemy, and unbelief also comes in and says the same, look at your sins, and the inconsistencies that we have been guilty of all our days become so many briars and thorns and unbelief sets them up against the Lord, and the Lord looks on and says, "Who would set the briars and thorns against Me in battle; I would go through them; I would burn them up. Or let him take hold of My strength and make peace with Me

and he shall make peace with Me" for "Fury is not in Me". Now faith receives this testimony when it is spoken by the Holy Spirit. "Fury is not in Me". O but you feel it is, but it is not, and faith will receive this. There is no fury in God to and for a repenting sinner. There is no fury in God for one who confesses his sins and comes weeping and mourning that he has done such and such things. "Fury is not in Me." So a sinner looks this way and he asks to get the testimony in his soul that he reads in holy Scripture. "Lay hold on eternal life", that is lay hold on Jesus Christ. Sick sinner, expect no balm but Christ's blood, and when faith lays hold of the dear Redeemer, when the Redeemer comes near enough for faith to lay hold of Him, then the issue of sin, condemnation, and guilt, all, all stopped, and the soul is healed with a powerful healing. "Lay hold of eternal life" in the power of it to swallow up your death; in the sweetness of it to sweeten every bitter that you have; in the strength of it to hold you up; in the fullness of it to convey itself to your soul in greater abundance than hitherto you have had it. "I give unto them eternal life". "I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly".

Lay hold of this dear friends. It is very solemn to be a sinner; it is very solemn to be a believer in conflict with sin. Very solemn to have doubts and fears about your standing, but those doubts and fears give exercise to faith. Lord, assure me that I am right; sprinkle Thy blood on my conscience that I may know whom I have believed. And the devil gets no real advantage; the sinner gets advantage over the devil when the Lord comes and rebukes and punishes the devil.

"Whereunto thou art also called". God has called His people and there is an end in His calling them. That they may have eternal life; that is the great end and they are apprehended for this. Yes, they are apprehended for this, and when they apprehend it, it is a great comfort and support to their minds. Paul desired this, that he might apprehend that for which he also was apprehended of Christ Jesus. And this was it, that the sinner might be with the Lord, be like Him and enter into the inheritance and enjoy it for ever. Yes, joy will come. Here a little; eternally it will fill the soul. It is sure to come. "These things have I spoken unto you that My joy might remain in you

and that your joy might be full." Filled with all joy and peace in believing through the power of the Holy Ghost. Called to this by the glory and virtue of God. Called to this by the mighty operation of the Spirit. Called to this against all opposition of a wicked nature, and all the opposition of a tempting, hating, and hateful devil.

"And hast professed a good profession before many witnesses". And this is true of many of the Lord's people. Some are afraid of making a profession. They feel they want more than they have had. Now if you have got faith, struggle on, struggle on; God is not an indifferent observer of your struggles. His heart is toward you, His will is toward you, His love is on you, His grace shall be sufficient for you and the day may come - God grant it may soon come - when you will have to say, few or many witnesses I must leave, but to profess a good profession before them is my desire. May the Lord help us and give us grace to walk in this Scripture, to "keep the field and never yield, but firmly eye the Saviour" in affliction, in necessity, in weakness, in trouble; when everything seems against you, to "keep the field and never yield, but firmly eye the Saviour."