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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Sunday evening 31 July 1932

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"

Two principal points occupied us this morning. First that it is a fight to hold what we have. What God has given, the devil, and indwelling sin try to rob us of. It is no little thing to be able, through grace, to hold fast what the Holy Ghost has given.

And the second point was to press on for more, and that always is opposed. Every step a child of God takes toward heaven is opposed by sin, the world, and the devil, but it is worth fighting for - "Soul and all's at stake".

I would add here yet a third point, namely "Fight the good fight of faith" for the honour and glory of God which involves this Book, the inspired Word of God. A great treasure God has given to His people in giving them the Scriptures. Paul, in the Romans, asks a question on the ground that the Jew is, in respect of sin, equal with the Gentile; no better. "What advantage then hath the Jew?" He answers the question - "Much every way, chiefly in that were committed unto him the oracles of God", that is the Holy Scripture then written, the Old Testament. And we may say, concerning the whole Bible, the perfect canon of Scripture, Old Testament and New Testament, God has given to His people - "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect throughly furnished unto all good works." Dear gracious friends, God give you grace to very highly value the Bible. You have got some parts of it in your hearts; hold them fast, fight for them. The honour of God is involved in them. When Israel was in the wilderness

and continually provoking God, God said to Moses, Were it not that I feared the enemy I would destroy them. That is to say, if God destroyed the Covenant people, broke His Covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, what would the enemy say? And if the Lord did not fulfil the Scripture, what would the enemy say? If He did not fulfil what He has said to some here, what would the enemy say? Where would be God's honour? It is a great Scripture that I have just quoted, Were it not that I feared the enemy; that is to say, if I destroyed this nation the enemy would have reason to blaspheme. And if God does not fulfil in His church, to the individual members of it, what He has said to her and to them, what would He do unto His great Name? It was Joshua I think who said in respect of the condition of the people, in respect of a prospective destruction, "What wilt Thou do unto Thy great Name?" If a worm should be trodden under foot of the devil, that worm being God's child, what would God do to His Name? "Fight the good fight of faith". O the enemy is busy. Adverse providences seem to give him a great advantage at times against the child of God. Hold fast. The church in Thyatira was in a sad condition but, said the Lord to her, "Hold fast that which thou already hast, that no man take thy crown." What are thousands of gold and silver to one intimation in your soul of God's favour? What is the world to one promise of God spoken to the heart by the Holy Spirit? Hold fast the truth as the truth is in Jesus. The blessed doctrine of God's sovereignty in election, the blessed doctrine of Christ's perfect redemption when He said - "It is finished"; the perfect work of the Holy Ghost carried on in the face of all opposition; hold fast, and fight the good fight of faith respecting God's Holy Word.

You will have difficulties. The word "fight" speaks of difficulties, of dangers, of trouble, of fear, of the enemy. One time the king of Assyria had thirty two kings with him against Israel, and Israel was like two little flocks of kids and the Assyrians filled the whole country. You may be like that, a poor little trembling sinner, fearful of sin, fearful of this providence, and of that untoward circumstance, and the enemy may say, Look at the difficulties; yea, look at the natural impossibilities. But the prophet said to the king of Israel - God will give all these into your hand, and a few hundred young men went to battle, and God discomfitted that vast army. So the child of God shall overcome. God gives him faith, and some of you

know the truth of what I am saying, God gives him faith to lay hold of the Lord and to say, Here I will, as helped live, here I will die, here I will plead the promises, here I will name the Name of the Lord Jesus who said to His disciples, "If ye shall ask anything in My Name I will do it". This is fighting, holding fast.

But I would draw your attention in the next place to the word "Lay hold on eternal life". What is this but laying hold of Christ who is the life of His people. When a saint is in trouble the Spirit may be secretly urging him to cast his case on Christ, to confess his sins before the Lord, to make known his weak condition, and his emptiness of good, his fullness of ill, and to say to the Lord that He knows that the soul, so poor, would be right, would be found in Christ. And every glimpse that that sinner gets of Christ, enabling him to follow after Christ, and to reach out the hand of faith to touch, if it might, the hem of the Saviour's garment, that is a fresh laying hold of eternal life. And here it is good to be enabled to mark very diligently what goes on in your soul. Look very closely at the attitude of your heart and mind toward Christ. If you find that He is the chief desire of your soul, the corner-stone, the chief corner-stone, the foundation, the tried stone, and that your soul gets glimpses of the everlasting salvation which He wrought out for His people, then there is nothing less than this, a fresh laying hold, and endeavouring to keep hold, of the dear Saviour. And there are moments when a tempted child of God can say he gets such a hold - "I held Him and would not let Him go". So precious, so desirable, so full of grace, and of glory, that the soul says - I cannot do without Thee Lord, and if I could, I would not. I would have Thee my portion, my inheritance. I would have that redemption which is in Thee, and that love that brought Thee from heaven to the cross, and that power that brought Thee out of the grave, and that glory that Thou now hast with Thy Father of which Thou didst say in the prayer recorded in John, "The glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them". Ah, all we need is in Him, and all we need to help us to do this - lay hold of Him - is the work, teaching, the touches, the illumination, the attraction of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit does draw the soul. The Father does draw the soul, and the Son does draw the soul. The Scripture makes it quite clear that the Holy Trinity is engaged in this great work of drawing sinners to Christ, and I again entreat you to watch very

narrowly the inward moving of your hearts to the Lord Jesus. But the enemy may send some modernist to you and he would say, Do not look at yourself. Do not think about yourself. Do not dwell on yourself. Do not go in that way of introspection, watching your thoughts and affections. I would say to you, Do not listen to him. How can you avoid looking narrowly into your case? What is the use of saying to a hungry man, Do not think about hunger? There is bread in that place and in the other place. He might say, I cannot get it. What is the use of saying to a poor hungry and naked man, "Be fed and clothed" and you do not give him wherewith to do so. I say, watch the affections of your spirit toward Jesus Christ. The man whose heart is that way may often be saying, I cannot attain to what I wish, but that man thus bent toward God in Christ and dying so will find himself in heaven. Can Christ draw a sinner and leave him to sink into perdition? Would the Spirit of Christ reveal the fullness and the love, and the grace, and the redemption, and the righteousness of Christ to a sinner, to let that sinner fail and come short? No, the Apostle says - "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God". Be not surprised if hell comes in the way. Yes, Rutherford says, seven hells, ten deaths; these may come in the way, but "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life". Does Jesus permit it? There was a poor woman with a disease, and she spent all that she had on physicians and was no better, and she heard of Christ coming along where she was. He does go where sinners are; O He does go where sinners are. He came for that purpose. And she said within herself, If I may but touch the hem of His garment, I shall be whole. A poor, weak woman, and I have said in this pulpit more than once that I believe that weak creature was stronger than the most robust, and bony, and muscular man in that crowd. Why? Because curiosity alone moved him; she, dying of this disease, and believing that He could heal her, had the energy of necessity, and she pressed through the crowd. A half-hearted believer, who is no believer, gives way, if I may speak so, to one who has real necessity. Press through the crowd.

Yield not then to unbelief
Courage soul, there yet is room

"Lay hold on eternal life." When you feel death within you, when you

feel the death of sin, when you feel weakness itself, when you are discouraged because no answers come to you, when you are dark, when the enemy has advantage over you, when delays on God's part to answer you are trying, then, then, lay hold on eternal life. And at the back of this there is a singular argument - "Whereunto thou art also called" Men do not seek Christ before they are called by grace. They do not want His fullness before they are emptied. They do not want His righteousness until their own is burnt to ashes. But when they are called by grace, and the Lord gives them to realise how lost they are, ragged vagabonds, sinners, haters of God, then the Holy Spirit is at work, then the Father is at work - "No man cometh unto Me except the Father which has sent Me draw him" - then the Son is at work - "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth will draw all men unto Me." This spake He of His death, the manner of His dying. And the Spirit is given by Jesus Christ to glorify Christ, and He glorifies Christ by taking that which is Christ's and showing it to faith. What is Christ's? What does He possess? Love, love tenderly expressed. Love spoken in an invitation - "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest". What does He possess? Infinite merit. He made an end of sin by the sacrifice of Himself. What does He possess? Life, eternal life. "I give unto My sheep eternal life". Power is His. "All power in heaven and in earth is given unto Me". He possesses glory to give to His children. And men are called to Him. "Come unto Me". I have no power to obey, says one. Let me remind you that on an occasion the Lord Jesus was walking and He saw two men in a boat. He said "Follow Me" and they followed Him. A little further on He saw other two men with their father mending their nets, and to these He said "Follow Me", and they left their father and their nets and followed Him. How was that? He gave power with the word. It was not a sound about their ears, it was a distinct voice in their hearts. So when Jesus speaks an invitation to a sinner, it is a call to that sinner and that sinner obeys the Almighty voice, and that is done again, and again. Said God to Abram, leave thy father, leave thy country, and Abram did so, and God went to him again and spoke to him and Abram laid hold of the life of the word. He believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness. And David was keeping his father's sheep and the lion and the bear came, and power came to David to seize them. And that is what comes to the people of God - power. Power over the Angel of the Covenant, power with God in prayer. And

this is laying hold. When your circumstances trouble you, God may say, "Come to Me". He may say it in your heart - Pour out your heart before the Lord. Lay hold of My strength. Make peace with Me, and ye shall make peace with Me. He may say to you, with an empty mind, an empty circumstance - Come to Me and I will fill thy mouth. "Lay hold on eternal life whereunto thou art also called". Paul said to the Corinthians - "Ye see your calling brethren". How did they see it? They were called from idolatry to worship the true God. The Thessalonians had the same mercy, and Paul said, You turned from idols to serve the living God, and to wait for His Son from heaven. Some of you can say, We remember when we had to turn from idols, when we were obliged to leave the world. We remember when we had to leave self-strength, and self-wisdom, and self-goodness, and go needy, and poor, and naked, and as dead, to the living God, to wait for Him and wait on Him, and you are called to it. "Whereunto ye are called". Perhaps with no remarkable distinctness at the beginning, but the call is there. It affects the heart, the mind, and judgement. The sinner says, I am in the road to hell, and if I continue so I shall be in hell, and that call turns him to the living God. He says, I am in the broad way that leads to destruction, and that turns him to the straight gate and the narrow way, and he is found waiting at Christ's gate, praying at His doors. He says, I have nothing but unbelief. What makes him say that? The possession of faith. If you have no faith, you do not know what unbelief is. You may think you believe without faith, but if you have faith you may say, Am I a believer? And God has called you to wait at Christ's door and watch at His gates to see if He will come and how He will come, and with what He will come. And the whole of the Bible is full of encouragement. "Whereunto thou art also called".

Now in the next place - "And hast professed a good profession". What is a profession? It is saying the same things that others have said. That is what the word "profession" means - "saying the same thing". What did Abraham say? Well he said to his son Isaac - who, seeing the fire and the wood, said "Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" - "God will provide Himself a lamb". What did David say when he was going to meet the giant. "God who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from this man who has blasphemed the armies of God". What does Paul say - "This is a

faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief". What have you said? Come, professor, what have you said? You have said secretly, Lord, I believe Thou canst save me if Thou wilt. Timothy was found by Paul who went to Derby and Lystra. He found Timothy, a young disciple, and doubtless a member of the church at Iconium - you have this in the Acts. And Timothy, joining the church and being baptised, made a good profession, and the good profession here means not only that he spoke well of what God had done for him, but most of all he spoke of God. He spoke of God. It was God's word concerning Job, notwithstanding his irritability, his sin in some of his speeches, vindicating himself against his unwise, misunderstanding friends. This was God's testimony of him that he had said the thing that was right of God. Timothy had said that. Timothy had said doubtless, God is holy, and I am a sinner. He had said, I am lost, Christ is a Saviour, and has come to me. He had said, I have nothing but filthy rags of my own, but Christ has clothed me with the robe of righteousness. He had said, I have been burnt to ashes by the teaching, the fiery teaching of the Spirit in my heart, and Christ has given me beauty for ashes. He had said, I am a poor, weak creature, and cannot be depended on for anything right, and God had said to me that He would work all manner of good things, that He would be my peace, and my strength, and my Mediator, my Intercessor, my High Priest, my King, my Lord, my Prophet. This was his profession. It was a good profession. It honoured God. A little while ago I read the experience of a man and when I had finished it I said, He bears witness of himself, He is his own witness. It was not a good profession though God was talked about. Mind this. A good profession is saying the thing that is right of God. God is first - Alpha. God is last - Omega. The first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet, nothing before, nothing after. I am God. "Is there a God beside Me? yea, there is no God; I know not any." I am God alone. And so in vital religion. "A good profession" - O I wish we had good professions constantly. In Apostolic days the Lord added daily to the church such as should be saved. Owen says, If the preaching of righteousness does not convert sinners then desolation must be expected, looked for, and surely today it must be said that we may well look for desolation for there is little converting work in the church, one here, and another there born again, but O the absence of unction, and power is very

ominous.

There may be here another profession. It is thought that this intends also the profession he made before the Presbytery when the hands of the Apostle Paul were laid on him, devoting him to the ministry, when this young man Timothy was publicly set apart for the great and solemn work of the ministry. And ere long he was a Bishop that is an Overseer in the Church of the living God. "Before many witnesses". What a mercy to have a religion that you must speak about. That will make you understand the Psalmist's word. "Come" he said "all ye that fear God, and I will tell you what He has done for my soul". The blessing of forgiveness, the blessing of gospel liberty, the blessing that the Holy Spirit brings in revealing the Lord Jesus. O that the Church of God might hear many, many such testimonies witnessing of what the Lord has done.

"Hast professed a good profession". Good in the first place because speaking of the living God, of His greatness, and His goodness, His majesty, and His mercy in Jesus Christ. And it would be well for the Church of Christ if there were men evidently called to preach. Not men who think they can preach, and who talk about Scriptures coming to them, telling them they must do this or that, but men whom the Church would see - not that the men want to be seen - and say, they must go. Thus may the Lord look upon His dear Church and people.

Now dear friends, I entreat you to look at this great Scripture, about which I have said but very little. It is a very full word This great battle, this good fight. Very little fighting in the world can be said to be good, but this fight is a good fight. Good because it stands for God. Good because it contends for what the sinner has received from God. Good because the issue is peace, peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

AMEN.