

The Good Fight of Faith

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by J. K. POPHAM

"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 6:12)

The Apostle has written to Timothy his son in the faith and warned him against various evils that abounded in the world; evils that would injure both his own soul and the church. He exhorts him to flee these things, "*But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.*" It seemed perhaps to some that if one were hungry for God and the things of God, the simplest thing for him would be to follow those things and to turn away from their opposite. But clearly the Holy Ghost sets before us the opposite of that; that it is by no means an easy thing to follow after God and the things of God. It is and ever must be a fight. "" He who would go to heaven must reckon on finding hell come in between him and the great object of his desire.

The text sets before us a fight, the fight of faith. It sets also before us the character of this fight, which is a "*good fight.*" War is an evil thing throughout the world; it has been so always and always will be in itself a terrible evil, but this war is a good one. It is the "*fight of faith,*" not the fight of reason. Faith will always have reason in its fallen condition to oppose it; but in the fight of faith, faith is credence; it believes whatever God has revealed. It believes what is incomprehensible, what proud nature tramples upon, and unseen things, and so believes them as to realize that they are of infinitely more worth than the whole world. If you have faith, faith in God, the faith which God gives, creating it in the heart, you will, according to this text and the whole of Scripture, be called upon to fight.

There is first of all, this to be noticed, that we are to fight with respect to the great object of faith. Faith has an object. The doctrine of faith is the doctrine of God; the Faith which He has delivered once for all to His saints. The doctrine of God is that there is this glorious Trinity. There is in Him everything that an immortal soul can need and desire. In the Trinity there are three wondrous, coequal Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The fight of faith will frequently be waged round about this great Object. The devil and indwelling sin, in some form will always bring into dispute the things concerning God, and when one cannot live apart from God, cannot be happy away from Him, regards Him as the only object of worship, love and trust, one finds he has to fight. If you would worship God the Father, you may find very often to your pain, grief, and shame, a spirit of irreverence, or unbelief, something in your heart that disputes this great truth that there is a God, and there is only one God to be worshipped. If you can at any time quietly, with struggle, godly fear, lively affection, wait on God, you will maintain that ground only by faith. Why, sometimes you may remember that you have not answered a letter,

you have forgotten it till you knelt down. You may sometimes seek the face of God with desire to worship Him and have been a considerable time without any question as to either His Being or His benevolence, but now when you seek Him and worship Him, questions will be thrust upon your mind, and you will maintain your ground here only by faith.

God is to be worshipped and He seeks worshippers to worship Him in Spirit, in truth, worshippers who believe in 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.*" (Heb. 11:6) If you have no faith it can truly be said, alas, that you never worshipped God; but if you have true faith, though it be very small, you will find yourself desiring to worship God, and as you desire to worship Him, there will come, more or less constantly, even violently, questions which will hurt your spirit and tend grievously to distract you. But here you must fight, seek to maintain the battle and seek to press forward, to know Him whom to know is life eternal. Mark that great point, for as I have said before the whole of vital religion may be comprised in that one word worship. If you can worship without distraction, and if in your spirit and in the view of your faith there is God in His goodness and in His fullness, in His eternal love, in His finished salvation, and in that great and blessed event of all true warfare, heaven itself, then you will find yourself called upon to engage in this great fight, the fight of faith. "*Fight the good fight of faith*" respecting the object of worship.

"*Fight the good fight of faith,*" secondly, in respect of the object of all trust and hope. Here we have the Person and the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. "*O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man who trusteth in Thee.*" The infinitely mysterious light in which God dwells, to which no man can approach, is darkness to us because of our incapacity to look upon that light. In infinite goodness God has come forth in these infinite depths of inaccessible light and manifested Himself in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Apostle's testimony is most true, "*Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh.*" (1 Tim. 3:16) All the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily here and all the pleasure of God dwells here, all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are here. Jesus is the object, the only true object of spiritual trust. There is His Person, the man Christ Jesus. I think the beauty of that is but little realized. The man Christ Jesus, the Mediator; the man who intervened in the quarrel; the man who interposed His precious blood, who despised the cross and thought it little to give His life for the sheep, to bear the curse of a broken law, to endure the hiding of His Father's face, to suffer death; and who died voluntarily in the full strength of His own life. He gave Himself a ransom, this man who was buried and was raised again from the dead, and who, after having shown Himself alive to His disciples by many infallible proofs, was received up into glory. This man must be the object of your trust, believer!

Then there is a devil who, when the child Jesus was born, sought to destroy that young life. There are many Herods today, stirred up by that same evil spirit. You have some in your own hearts. "*Fight the good fight of faith*" with respect to Christ's Person. Hold fast that Person without whom there is no access to God, no saving knowledge of Him; without whom can come no sweet beams of mercy, no glimpse of hope, no intimations of divine forgiveness, or of justification. Without Him you can never see God and live. Whatever contradictions come, whatever doubts assail, whatever reasonings may rise in you from time to time or be suggested to you by some who know Him not and believe not in Him, fight this fight. "*Whom have I,*" said one, "*in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee.*" (Ps. 73:25)

God has sent forth His beloved Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:10) When He was baptized, His Father said "*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*" (Matt. 3:17) When He would make revelation as to the future, He did so by His dearly beloved Son, "*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him.*" (Rev. 1:1) When He will bless you it will be by Jesus Christ. When He will remove your sins it will be through His precious intercession, the giving of Himself, His intervention in this great matter. "*Fight the good fight of faith*" with regard to the object of your trust; trust for this life, trust for providential things, trust for guidance through difficulties, trust for support under burdens, trust for a good and honourable finish, that you may be well laid in the grave and receive up into heaven. But look for hell to come in between, expect difficulties enemies, "oppositions of science falsely so called," self-interest, self-love, self-will, self-wisdom, self-strength; and these must be fought. Indulged, they will hurt you; fought, you will overcome one day. "*Fight the good fight of faith,*" when on your knees you would look to Jesus Christ, something will tell you it is of no use. When reading the Scriptures you would gaze upon Him, then proud reason may suggest something against inspiration or against this blessed Person. The Lord keep us from yielding, from attempting to patch up an inglorious peace; keep us fighting! There is an armour for this battle. "*Put on the whole armour of God.*" Having that, you can "*withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.*" There is no other way. Put on the armour of righteousness, on the right hand and on the left, that you may be able to stand and come off more than conqueror through Him that loved you.

"*Fight the good fight of faith*" with respect to the forgiveness of sins. This is by the blood of Jesus Christ only. "*Could my tears for ever flow,*" no efficacy would be in them. It is no easy thing to press your case upon God's notice in humble sincere confession of sin when your guilt appears blacker than the confines of hell, and when innumerable sins done in your heart if in no other way, rise up against you! When under some feeling apprehension of God's holiness, you feel you may and ought not to think of approaching so holy a Being, then, with all these things, press your case. "*Urge thy suit through all unfitness.*" This needs true faith, the faith of God's own operation, "*the faith of God's elect.*" Be not terrified, seeker, from the throne of God's heavenly grace. When you seek to approach Christ and there rise up against you innumerable sins, flee not away from that throne if you are told you will not be welcomed. Yield not to unbelief when the enemy says, "There is no use in this seeking," and perhaps when he says, and says truly, "You have been seeking for so long and have not found, therefore yield and give up, and no longer seek." Even then press on, because this wonderful blood shall one day take from you all sin. Having forgiven you all trespasses. It is one of the subtlest of all oppositions that you may meet, with respect to forgiveness, when it is fearfully suggested to you that your sins are beyond the blood of Jesus Christ. If possible the old enemy won't allow you to think that the sins of a creature are finite, but that the merits of the Redeemer are infinite. "*Fight the good fight of faith,*" in this particular.

"*Fight the good fight of faith*" in respect of justification. Justification is God's act passed on a guilty person; and it is the only thing that can give a title to heaven, that can bring a sinner before God without blame, without any unworthiness, to be righteous as Christ is righteous. This is the justification that shall carry all the blessed subjects of it to eternal bliss. But you are always doing that which brings guilt, always thinking wrong thoughts, often saying wrong words, wishing wrong things, turning your face to the world and your back to God; always by the power of indwelling sin, failing; what then of justification? You will need to fight for your title. You

need to fight to hold fast that which God has passed upon you, that great act of justification, by virtue of which He could, and did say for substance: Thou art all fair, there is no spot, no wrinkle, no evidence of decay, but thou art a perfectly justified person in My sight. "*Fight the good fight of faith,*" in respect of trust.

"*Fight the good fight of faith*" to the promises of the gospel. These are many; one includes them all, and yet there are many. "*I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*" (Hebrews 13:5) But then one says, according to his feelings, "I am forsaken; I have not the presence of God with me; I seek Him and do not find Him; I ask Him to come and He seems to take no notice of me; I ask Him to be with me in a difficult path and I appear to be left alone; I ask Him to shine upon me and I walk in darkness and have no light." Now, "*fight the good fight of faith*" here. "*Who is among you that feareth the LORD,....that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord and stay upon his God.*" Yield not to all these contrary and contradicting feelings, fight this fight. Has God told you that He will bless you indeed? Has He promised to guide you with His eye; never to leave you nor forsake you? Then this must be said to you:

"Judge not the Lord by feeble sense.
But trust him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence,
He hides a smiling face."

Blind unbelief always errs, it cannot but err; it is against God, against His truth, against His promise. Cleave to a faithful God; hold fast to what He has said to you. "*God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it?*" (Numbers 23:19) Did He ever say to you that He would be with you? And can He break the promise? O! But I have sinned. Yes, and He knew that you would sin. But I am unworthy. And whoever got a promise on the ground of worthiness? Whoever got a fulfilment of the promise because he was worthy? Ask all those blessed ones in heaven how they got there. Will they bring in some little reason from their faithfulness, their sticking fast to God? No! Grace, free and sovereign grace, constant and unfailing grace, in its abundance, in its efficacy, in its blessedness, grace in all its riches, and grace alone, shall be the song. "*Fight the good fight of faith*" respecting the promise of God.

"*Fight the good fight of faith,*" with respect to the precepts of the gospel. Old nature would gladly turn the grace of God into lasciviousness, but the precepts of the gospel are made dear to all who love the gospel. Perhaps some of you have by moments known in your own conscience that these precepts are to be highly valued and very narrowly regarded and punctually obeyed, and you have desired so to walk before God. There were many in apostolic days in the professing church who turned away, who turned the grace of God into lasciviousness, and it would be well for us to be constantly zealous respecting the perceptive parts of Holy Scripture. The carnal mind will fight against the perceptive part. It may be said, if God has taken you up into the covenant you are safe; if the Holy Spirit has quickened you, that divine life will never perish; therefore why be so punctilious? Why so observe all your steps? Why question your motives? Why groan under any failure? Why, we can answer in a moment: The grace of God forbids us to sin; the blood of Christ forbids us to sin; the love of God forbids us to sin. It makes men who know God in the ways I have mentioned, very careful about their walk. Let your conversation, let your

whole deportment be as becometh the gospel of Christ. In these particulars may we be enabled to regard this word, "*Fight the good fight of faith.*"

Let us notice the word in the next place, subjectively; that is to say, with respect to the enemies we have in our own nature. God is the great object of faith and we shall have to fight to maintain our hold of Him, but we who have believed and do believe, have an evil heart, an unbelieving heart in us, and well will it be for us if we have grace to take heed to the apostle's word in the epistle to the Hebrews, "*Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.*" (Hebrews 3:12) You have got your own Zoar, "*spare it, is it not a little one?*" "*Take us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes.*" If we have grace to be careful respecting the sin that dwells in us, and respecting the subtleties of the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, it will be well for us.

"*Fight the good fight of faith*" when nature tempts you to neglect the throne of grace. Nature craves a little ease. Fight my friends, struggle to get to God; labour to enter that house where satisfaction is. "*Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest, and causest to approach unto Thee, that he may dwell in Thy courts; we shall be satisfied with the goodness of Thy house, even of Thy holy temple.*" (Psalm 65:4) This turning from the throne of God's heavenly grace is like going away from the market, a market where everything is sold and no money is asked; it is going away from food into famine, from cleanness to uncleanness, and from godliness to lust. It is yielding to the old man, and to our wicked nature. I appeal to your experience, O people of God. When has it been well with you? When has your armour been bright? When have your feelings been godly? When has your trust been simple and direct as placed upon God? Has it been when you have turned your back upon the throne of God's heavenly grace and you have been indulging in old natures delightful sleep? No. Every gracious person will say we have brought guilt on our consciences and leanness to our souls and deadness to our affections when we have so lived; but whenever we have been lively, whenever we have been tender, whenever we have walked before the Lord, whenever we have had a little dew on our branches, it has been when, through the Spirit's power, we have sought the Lord and waited upon Him. "*Wait on the Lord.*"

This is a fight! The whole strength of corrupt nature is against the motion of a little faith. All the reasons that a corrupt heart can produce against prayer it will, and will even try to corrupt the decrees of God in order to turn us from prayer, telling us that God has ordained this, and whether you pray or not it must come to pass, and that that is settled, and whether you ask Him to bless you or not it must be. It is a fight! Some of you will be able to sympathize with me in this when I repeat, it is a fight to pray. God help us to regard this. "*Pray without ceasing,*" said the Lord by His servant, "*Pray without ceasing.*" When the disciples were unable to cast out the spirit from the poor afflicted lad whose father brought him to them and Christ did it, they said to Him afterwards, "*Why could not we cast him out?*" Why did we fail? Why did we fail so egregiously before all the people so that they may well question whether we are true disciples of Thine? Said the Lord to them, "*This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.*" (Matthew 17:17-21) I know to my cost something of this. "*Fight the good fight of faith.*" Fight with hell between you and the throne of grace; with hellish reasons between you and an inviting Saviour. Fight that fight which in the issue, will bring peace and prosperity to your soul. "*The soul of the diligent shall be made fat.*" (Proverbs 13:4) Have you ever feared the slumber of the sluggard, the

idleness of the sluggard, his indisposition to take his hand from his bosom to convey food to his mouth? Have you ever feared the idleness of the sluggard's desire? "*The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing.*" O, if you fear these things, God give you grace to fight the fight of faith, to fight your way to the throne of God's heavenly grace, who said: There will I meet with you; there will I commune with you; there will I tell My mind; there will I discover My love; there will I make you know that I am your God and that you belong to Me.

"*Fight the good fight of faith*" against corrupt reasonings. There is an awful astigmatism upon fallen reason. It will suggest numberless things against God, and it will dare to say within you horrible things about Him. I wish I did not know this. What tears of shame may have trickled down some of your cheeks as you have heard these voices in your hearts against God! Still, this is left to us, "*Fight the good fight of faith.*" Put the whole armour of God on. Take with you the shield of faith wherewith you shall be able to intercept the fiery darts of the wicked one, your wicked reason.

Do you wonder, those of you who know your own hearts, that Rutherford should say, "O that I had not a myself!?" Do you wonder that the Apostle Paul had the conflict that made him cry out, "*O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*" And do you wonder that you should, if you cease to fight, fall a prey to corrupt reason? How God will take all the astigmatism from reason and put it straight with His own divine will and mysteries when we have done with this life, one cannot tell, but here it is an enemy to Christ. Sanctified it is otherwise, but in itself it is an enemy; therefore never reason more about the matter. Has God said? Has God spoken? O! For faith to believe Him.

Paul went against reason a good deal and fought strongly against it in that Scripture "*For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; 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.*" (2 Cor. 4:18) Look at your affliction; it mortifies you, it is against your interest apparently, it says: There is no wisdom in this, there is no goodness in this, it seems only unmitigated evil. Look at the effect of it, how sadly you are crippled, paralyzed here and there in this movement and in that thing; and as you look at the thing seen you see only mortification and trouble and emptiness and a kind of death. Look at unseen things by faith! How beautiful the Lord is. How glorious is Christ; how wonderful is His death, how efficacious is His blood, how prevailing is His intercession. Look at His promises. Look at His power, and at His wisdom; who can circumvent Him? What can overcome Him? What can militate effectually against His purposes? How beautiful is the Lord; how great is His beauty! Faith looking at these things says with the Apostle Paul, "*Be of good cheer; for I believe God.*" I believe Him above appearances. I believe Him above things seen. I believe Him above the roaring of the waves and the creaking of the parting planks. I believe God. I believe He will bring us all to land. "*Fight the good fight of faith.*" When you look at things seen you will faint, but when you look at unseen things you will be strong. "*Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.*" "*Thou therefore,*" says the Apostle Paul to Timothy, "*endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*"

"*Fight the good fight of faith,*" against your rebellious will, a will that is stubborn in its opposition to some of God's ways with you. A will that asserts itself and dares to say sometimes

in some heart, *"I won't bear it, I won't do it."* A will that has gone so far as to say to the Lord: It is too bad of Thee to tell me to do this; I will never do it. Blessed be God for changing the will, changing the mind, and giving grace to one who has stubbornly said he would not do a thing, to ask Him, the blessed sin-forgiving God, to permit him to do it! God can change things! Times and seasons are in His hand. The will is a strong thing, stubborn, determined to have its own way. You say; If I follow the inclination of my mind, the dictates of my will, I shall go against God. Fight, poor sinner. Fight this awful thing, this self-will. One of the hardest words to utter sincerely and worshipfully to God in certain circumstances in this, *"Thy will be done."* He who has power to say this, has fought a good fight and can say, *"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me."* (2 Timothy 4:8)

Fight against all the corruptions and lusts of a fallen nature. These are not easily overcome, they are persistent, they are insistent, and they know no shame. They will always be obtruding themselves upon your attention, and into your quiet moments when you would be worshipping God. Perhaps when you are saying: I would be holy, I would follow the Lord Jesus Christ, I would deny self and take up my cross; even then you may find that they will quietly, subtly insinuate themselves into your thoughts. Fight this good fight; it is good because God is the end of it. It is good because it is against everything that God hates. It is good because it is against fallen nature so full of what is contrary to God's nature, and is rebellion against God's revealed will. Fight this good fight; it is good in itself.

You are engaged in a warfare and there is an issue! It is good in the issue. Says Paul, *"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course,..henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing."* Why brethren, heaven is before you. God in His trinity of persons; God, in all those wonderful emanations of His goodness and glory is before you. God who shall be in the midst of His wondrous company and lead them all to living fountains of water, so that they shall thirst no more and have all their tears wiped away from their eyes. God is to be had and enjoyed, and will be so enjoyed. This is the issue, *"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne."* (Rev. 3:21) See, sinner engaged in this deadly warfare, what God has set before you! See the heaven you are going to; the company you are to have through eternity. The Trinity to embrace you, to welcome you and to shine upon you, the throne of God before which you are to stand for ever, the throne of God and of the Lamb, where also are, *"the seven Spirits of God,"* the Holy Ghost.

Is this not an amazingly sweet and powerful incentive to fight this good fight of faith? Quit not the field; patch up no inglorious peace; but fight on! But I am weak. If you were not, you would not do for this battle. I do not know how to fight. God will teach your hands to fight and your fingers to war. But what of my enemies? If you know no enemies you will only beat the air if you pretend to fight, but if you know your enemies, if you know your sins, if you know Satan the accuser of the brethren, if you know these things you will know what enemies you are to expect to meet with. How am I to overcome them" *"Put on the whole armour of God,....that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."* (Eph. 6:13)

God help you to remember this word. "*Fight the good fight of faith.*" If you would go to heaven, expect to meet hell in the way. If you would be holy, expect the trouble of pollution. If you would be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, expect to the very end to meet with that powerful foe, which Philpot calls the strong limb of the old man unbelief. Disputing you will always have, more or less distinctly in your minds against God. But what encouragement there is for us! May God open this mystery to us and grant us grace to "*fight the good fight of faith.*" Amen.