

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. - 1 Peter 2:2

THE SINCERE MILK OF GOD'S WORD

The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword... - Hebrews 4:12

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“Follow After...”

In **1 Timothy 6:3-10**, the Holy Spirit through Paul warns against several evils, including sinful attitudes toward earthly riches. He follows up these warnings by telling Timothy in **verse 11**, “*But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.*”

The phrase “*man of God*” in this verse may have specific application to the work Timothy was doing at the time, but in a general sense, it is a phrase that could be applied to all Christians. Those who belong to God must live in sharp contrast to the evils of the world by fleeing such sins as those mentioned at the beginning of **1 Timothy 6**, and deliberately following after such virtues as those mentioned in **verse 11**. Consider some things Scripture teaches related to each of these six virtues.

The first thing the verse commands following after is *righteousness*.

This command is parallel to Jesus’ statement in **Matthew 5:6**, where He said, “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.*” The words “*hunger and thirst*” denote a zealous *longing for* and *pursuit of* righteousness.

We should have a strong spiritual appetite, and earnestly strive to *be* right with God by *learning* and *doing* what He says is right.

One who has this spiritual appetite will long for God’s Word (**1 Pet. 2:2**), so that what is right can be known and practiced, and fellowship with God can be received.

The second thing **1 Timothy 6:11** says we must follow after is *godliness*.

Godliness does not necessarily mean “godlikeness,” though there *are* some characteristics of God we should strive to emulate. The foremost meaning, though, of the word translated godliness is *reverence* and *respect* toward God.

Hebrews 12:28 alludes to the fact that we must “*serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.*” **Proverbs 1:7** says that “*the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.*” In order to receive the wisdom from above, we must recognize and accept God’s authority to tell us what to do. This is what godliness is about.

1 Timothy 6:11 also notes *faith* as something we must follow after.

The way Scripture typically speaks of faith is defined in **Hebrews 11:1**, which says, “*Now faith is assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen.*”

Though having “*a conviction of things not seen*” may seem baseless to some, Scripture shows that faith is grounded on the surest foundation imaginable: the Word of our Creator. **Romans 10:17** says, “*Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.*”

God has supplied the perfect Seed that produces faith (His Word), and when that Seed falls into “*an honest and good heart*” (**Luke 8:15**), faith is produced. Thus, building faith requires preparing one’s heart to receive the truth, and feeding one’s soul with the spiritual nourishment of God’s Word.

Those who do this develop an unwavering *trust* in God that leads to *obedience* to His commands (cf. **Rom. 1:5; 16:26**), even when what He says or commands conflicts with *man’s* “wisdom.”

A secondary meaning of the term “faithfulness” involves being reliable or *trustworthy*. God is the perfect example of this (**1 Cor. 1:9; 10:13**), and it is our duty to be dependable in our service to Him with that which He entrusts us.

1 Timothy 6:11 also commands *love*.

The word translated “*love*” in this verse (*agape*) is far deeper than a “good feeling” toward someone or something. It is far deeper than that which one unintentionally “falls” into or out of. *Agape* love is a *deliberate choice* to seek others’ highest good. It involves *selflessness* and *sacrifice*, and is proven by *action*.

There is no greater example of love than that which God provided in the sending of His Son. The word “*so*” in **John 3:16** emphasizes that God not only loves the people of the world, but loves us to such an *extent* that He endured seeing His Son suffer unimaginable pain in order to offer forgiveness of sins to people who have grossly *mistreated* Him.

Given what He has done for us, the least we can do is love *Him* in response. Doing so involves making it our aim to please God (**2 Cor. 5:9**), by truly putting His will ahead of our own (cf. **Matt. 26:39**). This depth of commitment is *proven* by *obedience* to God’s commands (**1 John 5:3**).

God’s love should also motivate us to love others (**1 John 4:11**). Just as God endured the pain of His Son dying because of His genuine concern for *our* well-being, we ought to make the sacrifices that are appropriate in order to help others.

A fifth virtue **1 Timothy 6:11** commands following after is *patience*.

The word for “*patience*” could also be translated “*perseverance*” (*WEB*) or “*steadfastness*” (*ESV*). This sheds light on the biblical concept of patience. It involves

constancy in doing right, especially through trials (cf. **2 Thes. 1:4**).

The opposite of patience is seen in Jesus’ parable of the sower, with the seed that fell in rocky places (i.e. shallow, shaky faith that stumbles when trials come) (**Luke 8:13**). Seed that falls on good ground, by contrast, is stable, bringing “*forth fruit with patience*” (**Luke 8:15**). Developing patience is helped when we look to biblical examples of others whose faith endured when faced with fiery trials (**Heb. 12:1**).

The final thing **1 Timothy 6:11** commands following after is *meekness*.

Though meekness is often viewed as a *weakness*, Scripture describes meekness as a *strength*. The meekness God demands is not a “push-over” attitude (**Eph. 4:14**), but an attitude related to self-control, humility, gentleness, and proper submissiveness. In many ways, meekness is the opposite of being *self-assertive*.

The hymn *Have Thine Own Way, Lord* expresses the attitude of meekness well. Meekness is needed to allow God to mold us like clay as *He* desires. The attitude of meekness accepts God as our Master and yields to His guidance (**James 1:21**). It also yields to others when appropriate, and opposes haughtiness (cf. **Titus 3:2**).

It is noteworthy that the words “*follow after*” precede the six virtues of **1 Timothy 6:11**. Scripture opposes the ideology that one’s character is fixed and “people don’t change who they are.” Each of us *can* and *must* change as God desires, but it requires deliberate and zealous pursuit. Being who God desires does not happen by accident. May we each *choose* the path of righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and meekness.

- **Michael Hickox**