

STUDY ON THE BOOK OF FIRST TIMOTHY

REJECT GREED, PURSUE GODLINESS!

Read 1 Timothy 6:3-21

Introduction.

It is so easy to slip into a life focused on wealth and material goods. We work to gain money so we can live, always focused on the material. Once we earn enough to survive, then we look for an apartment and clothes. Then a house of our own, a car, better furniture. Then, as our earning potential increases, a vacation home. John D. Rockefeller (1839-1937), perhaps the richest person in history, was asked, "How much money is enough?" He answered, "Just a little bit more."

Money, Contentment, and Godliness

"If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself." (vv3-5)

In drawing to the close of the letter, Paul referred again to a theme he mentioned in the first chapter — that Timothy must be on guard against those who would misuse the word of God. "Teaches otherwise" in this context may mean replacing the plain teaching of God's word with a focus on prophecies and visions and strange spiritual experiences people claim. This was a great danger that Paul warned Timothy against.

Paul warned Timothy against the argumentative heretic, who has left the word of God to promote his own ideas — who does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. He warned Timothy against those who seemed to treat the Word of God more as a plaything instead of as a precious gift. "Even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ" might seem like an unnecessary warning against an obvious danger. Yet the warning was necessary because those who misuse God's truth don't advertise themselves that way. They often claim to honour God's word while in fact misusing it.

There are different ways that people do not consent to the truth of God's Word.

- Some deny God's Word.
- Some ignore God's Word.
- Some explain away God's Word.
- Some twist God's Word using it as a toy to be played with in debate and disputes.

One can be surrounded by God's truth; one can even memorize the Bible, and not have it effect the life for eternity. Curiosity or interest in God's Word without submission to it is a grave danger. In our day — a time when we are overwhelmed with useless information — it is easy to regard the Bible as useless information or as a source of answers to trivia questions, but not as a book with truth that confronts and transforms my life. Bible study is not trivial pursuit; to treat the Bible other than as an authoritative word of God is to misuse it. Paul used the words:

- **He is proud, knowing nothing.** This describes those who misuse God's Word. Yet, as all the proud, they don't see or admit to their lack of knowledge. And, like most proud people, they can convince others that they are experts in God's truth, when they misuse it.
- **Obsessed with disputes and arguments.** Those who misuse God's Word may be expert debaters on their current doctrinal hobbyhorse; but their desire to constantly debate some aspect of doctrine shows their unwillingness to humbly receive the truth.

- **Envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions.** This is the fruit of the disputes and arguments of those who misuse God's truth. Their presence in a church body is the source of all kinds of division and discontent; though they may appear to be experts on the Bible, they do damage to God's church. Therefore, Paul warned Timothy, "From such withdraw yourself."

Godliness with Contentment

"Now godliness with contentment is great gain." (v6)

Paul told Timothy that those who misuse God's Word wrongly think godliness is a means of material gain. Knowing his statement might be misunderstood, he followed up with an explanation. It is true that godliness is great gain; but only when accompanied by contentment.

When one does not live by "the itch for more," and one's life is not dominated by shopping for and acquiring material things, we can have the kind of contentment in God and in His will for our lives. Paul knew this kind of contentment first hand; here is his testimony in Philippians 4:11-13: *"Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things, I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*

It is true that material possessions in and of themselves do not corrupt us; Paul could abound in material things and still keep it all in proper perspective. But too many use this truth to excuse their own materialism and carnal lack of contentment.

Godliness really can bring almost unbelievable contentment; but before it can, we must be transformed by the renewing of your mind (Romans 12:2) — to start putting material things in their proper priority next to spiritual things.

- It's easy for many Christians to say they have this contentment; but whether they have it or not is often more truthfully known by their spending and shopping habits. How much of a place does shopping and buying have in your life? How does material loss affect your happiness? How happy do you get from having some material thing?
- When we live and act without contentment, we are trying to fill needs in our lives — a need to be "somebody," a need to feel secure or cared for, a need to have excitement and newness in our lives — most people try to fulfil these needs with material things, but they can only really be met by a spiritual relationship with the God who made us.

The Temptation to Get Rich

"For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." (vv7-10)

A baby is born not only penniless, but without even a pocket to put pennies in. Just as certainly, we can carry nothing out — the things that make a man rich in this world mean nothing in the world to come. A heart of contentment begins with seeing our material possessions and resources in an eternal perspective. It has been wisely observed that a moving trailer of goods never follows a hearse. Everything one might take with them to the world beyond is left behind. Gold is a precious commodity on earth; in heaven God uses it to pave the streets.

Jesus once told a parable that has troubled some people. In Luke 16:1-14, He spoke of a dishonest manager, who was about to be called to account. Knowing he will be fired, he began to settle accounts with his master's

debtors at terms favourable to the debtors, so they would treat him kindly when the master fired him. The master ended up complimenting the manager for his shrewd tactics (presumably before he fired him). The manager was praiseworthy for two reasons. First, he knew he would be called to account for his life, and he took it seriously. Secondly, he took advantage of his present position to arrange a comfortable future. We can use our material resources right now for eternal good — even though we can't bring them with us. We can carry nothing out — but we can send ahead eternal blessing and reward through wise use of our resources right now.

The Fruit of a Desire for Wealth!

Significantly, the desire for riches is far more dangerous than the riches themselves — and it isn't only the poor who desire to be rich, it is also the rich who want more riches. Poor does not mean godly and rich ungodly; nor is it true the other way around. There were many remarkably godly men in the Bible who were almost unbelievably rich, such as Abraham, David, and Solomon. But the godly rich have the heart like the Psalmist in Psalm 62:10: *If riches increase, do not set your heart on them.*

Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare. This desire for riches tempts our heart away from eternal riches and ensnares us in a trap few can escape — always dreaming of riches, and always setting one's heart on them. The desire to be rich can really only be satisfied in Jesus Christ and satisfied with spiritual riches rather than material ones. Everything else falls short. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. The love of money can motivate any evil on this earth. There is no sin that cannot be committed for the sake of money. The quest for more... This is the fate of those who live in the love of money. They are not satisfied.

Exhortation to a Man of God

“But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing, which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honour and everlasting power. Amen.”
(vv11-16)

Timothy was commanded to be different from those who lived for riches and material wealth. He was to flee the proud arguments of those who misuse God's Word and who suppose that we should follow God just for what we can get out of it. Paul instructs him as follows:

- ***Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness:*** Instead of pride and riches, Timothy was to make these things his pursuit. These are things which are often not valued in our present age but are very valuable to God. This challenge to leave some things and follow hard after some other things isn't just directed to Timothy, but to everyone who would be a man [or woman] of God — as opposed to being a man of this world.
- ***Fight the good fight of faith:*** Going God's way — against the flow of this world — won't be easy. Therefore, Timothy had to have a soldier's determination. God calls us to be fighters, but to fight the good fight of faith — a fight where some may lose a battle here and there, but they will carry on the fight with great determination until the war is over — when we lay hold on eternal life.
- ***Timothy was drafted into this war:*** To which you were also called. But Timothy also volunteered: And have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. Timothy had to consider both to set his thinking right for the fight. God had called him, and he had also freely chosen. Since Paul

called Timothy to a difficult battle, it was good for him to know that the orders were given under this great God. Timothy had an obligation to serve the Creator who gave him life.

Until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing was how long Timothy was supposed to fight the good fight. There is always danger that a good effort will simply not last long enough, and end in defeat. Knowing who Jesus is equipped Timothy to fight the good fight. History is filled with example of armies that have been led to spectacular victories because the men knew and loved their leaders. Therefore, here Paul described Jesus to Timothy.

- He is the blessed and only Potentate — the One who alone has all power and strength, who rules over the universe from an occupied throne in heaven.
- He is the King of kings and Lord of lords; the majesty of man fades in comparison to the glory of Jesus. The richest, smartest, most influential persons on earth are midgets next to King Jesus.
- He alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see: He is holy. Jesus is not merely a super-man; He is the God-man; truly immortal without beginning or end; with a glory which if fully revealed would strike any human dead.

Knowing who this Jesus is should bring forth a response — not primarily, “what can He do for me?” but a response of simple and profound worship — declaring honour and everlasting power towards this great God. Amen! In the phrase “*to whom be honour and everlasting power*”: Paul praised the glory and honour of the exalted, enthroned Lord Jesus Christ. He is a unique man (who alone has immortality) and a glorified man (unapproachable light).

Positive Commands for the Rich

“Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.” (vv17-19)

These ones might be rich now, but they must use their riches responsibly if they will be rich in the age to come. These are Paul's instructions to those who are rich in this present age:

- **Not to be haughty:** Pride is a constant danger with riches. It is very easy to believe that we are more because we have more than another man has.
- **Nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God:** God knows our tendency to trust in riches instead of in Him. He guards us against this danger because He wants us to trust in that which is most certain — in Him and not in uncertain riches.
- **Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give:** Being a giver, and doing good with our resources is what guards our heart from materialism and trusting in uncertain riches.
- **Lay hold on eternal life:** Paul's idea was to Timothy, “Leave the pursuit of money aside and be content with your work as a minister of the gospel. Your hand is not big enough to lay hold of two things. Therefore, since you can only have one, see that it is the vital thing. Lay hold on eternal life.”

Conclusion: A final charge.

“O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge— by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith.” (vv20-21)

Paul had confidence in Timothy, and he did trust him. Yet Paul also knew how great the power of seduction is, and how high the stakes are — so he warned, and warned, and warned again. The gospel is a trust committed to pastors like Timothy; but also, to all believers. And when that trust is broken, some have strayed concerning the faith. We must do all that we can to keep this trust.