

1 Timothy 6

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There are many, many different ways in which people take the Bible and turn it to their own purposes, but one of the most popular today is what is called the gospel of health and wealth. As all of us know, we live in a very materialistic society. We have been richly blessed by God, but the richness of our blessings doesn't stop us from wanting more. We may live in a house that is twice the size of the houses our grandparents lived in, but we still cast covetous eyes at the even bigger house two blocks over. This preoccupation with money leaves many too busy to have time for God.

The health-and-wealth folks recognized this materialist preoccupation, but instead of teaching that wealth is fleeting and only the soul is eternal, they decided they needed to make their churches more appealing to materialistic people. Here's what they started saying: they started saying that God wants His people to be rich, so if you trust in God, have faith, and above all, contribute lots of money to the church, then God is going to bless you right back and make sure that you become wealthy. Their primary focus is not getting to heaven, but getting rich.

Of course, there is nothing new under the sun. There is no false doctrine imaginable that hasn't already been thought up hundreds or thousands of years ago. The gospel of health and wealth was not invented by TV preachers; in fact, some foolish people in the first-century church held the same beliefs. This is quite evident from what Paul says in the sixth chapter of 1 Timothy. In this chapter, Paul continues to address several topics that have to do with the way Christians should live and interact in the church. However, the topic that he spends the most time on is how to develop a right attitude toward wealth. Paul tells us that it's OK to be rich. It's OK to enjoy the material blessings that God gives us. However, it becomes a problem when we love money, not God. Let's consider this in 1 Timothy 6.

Understanding Money

The discussion of the chapter begins with a section that looks back to the topics of the last chapter, in which Paul explored various relationships within the church. He continues his discussion of this topic with a brief commentary on **SERVANTS AND MASTERS**. This appears in 1 Timothy 6:1-2. Here, Paul addresses two interconnected ideas: the way that servants should consider their masters generally, and the attitude that the Christian servant should have to the master who is a believer also. Paul's basic point is that whoever our master is, we need to honor him. Of course, this was originally written to slaves, but the same instruction applies to employees today. In this context, honor means that we give value for the wages we are paid, obey to the fullest extent of our abilities, and speak respectfully of our employers at all times. If we don't do this, we may well lead our masters and co-workers to blaspheme Jesus because of our worthlessness. In the workplace, as in all situations, we are ambassadors for Christ, and we need to act like it.

If we're blessed enough to work for an employer who's already a Christian, we shouldn't take advantage of our spiritual relationship to slack off and mouth off because we figure he's a brother and not going to fire us. Instead, if anybody's to get any benefit out of the relationship, it should be our employer. We should work hard for everyone, but we should work even harder if we serve a Christian, because then our work directly benefits someone we care about.

This teaching about masters and servants, along with all of the preceding teaching about elders, widows, and so on, is quite important, as we see from the following condemnation of **FALSE TEACHERS**. Look with me at 1 Timothy 6:3-5. Paul, of course, is not describing a single individual who contains all of these evil characteristics, although some false teachers do. Instead, he's presenting a list of reasons why people may oppose the truth. They may be arrogantly attached to their own false opinion, they may be ignorant of the truth, they may enjoy quarreling with brethren, or they may think they can make money by teaching falsehood. Regardless of the motivation, the effects of false teaching are the same. It produces strife in the church that poisons the brethren against each other, generates evil conduct and thoughts, and leads to nothing positive. It's certainly important for us to watch out for false teaching in others, but this is a warning to ourselves as well. Whenever we teach, or even just make a comment in Bible class, we need to examine both what we're saying and why we're saying it. We shouldn't make confident assertions when we are ignorant, when we're wrong, we should acknowledge it and move on, and our goal should be enlightenment, not argument. If we don't keep these things out of our conduct, it may well be that we start drifting into the category of false teacher too.

From there, Paul springboards off of his last comment to the topic of **GODLINESS AND GAIN**. He discusses this in 1 Timothy 6:6-8. His basic point is that even though it's evil to use the gospel to get rich, there is a sense in which discipleship brings wealth. Christianity teaches us to be content, and when we learn contentment, even if we only have a little, we're far richer than the rich man who is still constantly hungry for more. We're taught to be content when we consider just how transitory this world and its riches are. No matter how hard we work, no matter how much we earn, sooner or later, we're going to leave all of our wealth behind, and it's going to be burned up. When wealth is so temporary, it's senseless to get attached to it. It's very easy for us to agree to this statement, but we need to make sure

that we're actually living this way too. Are we really as contented as Paul says we should be, happy with our lot even if we don't have anything more than food to eat and clothes on our backs? Many slaves in the first-century church were in exactly that position. Or do we buy into the philosophy of the world around us more than we want to admit, so that we too are locked into the never-ending pursuit of stuff? We must keep ourselves free from greed and its consequences.

Paul elaborates on this subject as he explores **THE LOVE OF MONEY**. This well-known passage appears in 1 Timothy 6:9-10. Notice first of all that the way this text is often misquoted is not what it says. Paul does NOT say that money is the root of all evil. In fact, money, like all other forms of wealth, is a gift from God, which makes it basically good. Money's not the problem. Love of money is the problem. This isn't to say that we shouldn't work hard. This isn't to say that we shouldn't care about providing for our families. However, when earning money becomes an end in itself, or when accumulating stuff becomes an end in itself, that's when we're in spiritual danger. At that point, our love of money becomes a lever for the devil. We've all known people whose jobs kept them so busy that they didn't have time for the Lord. Usually, those people weren't in danger of starving if they didn't work so much, but they were so in love with the idea of earning money that God got shut out. Brethren, there's nothing good down that road. Love of money will never make us happy, because no matter how much we have, we'll always want more, and ultimately, it will cost us our souls. We will have given up our most valuable possession for something that's worthless.

Righteous Living

Paul presents an alternate mode of life when he urges Timothy on into **THE GOOD FIGHT**. This exhortation begins in 1 Timothy 6:11-12. It's significant that in reference to love of money and false teaching, Paul urges Timothy to flee them. We should learn from this too. Our object should not be to get as close to sin as we can without sinning. The godly attitude is not to like money a whole, whole lot, but to avoid loving it. The godly attitude is to get as far away as we can from loving money. Similarly, the godly attitude is to get as deep as we can into the virtues that Paul describes next. We should never say, "I'm righteous enough, so I don't have to work on it anymore," or "I'm patient enough, so I don't have to work on it anymore." The truth is that none of us are anywhere near as righteous as Christ, or godly as Christ, or believing as Christ, or loving as Christ, or anything else. We have no excuse to quit struggling, and, as Paul makes clear, it is a struggle. It's a fight, and if we want to go to heaven, we're going to have to fight for it every step of the way. God has called us to eternal life, and we've confessed that Jesus is our Lord. Our only option is to live like it.

We have to work so hard at service because **THE LORD** is so glorious. Paul explores this idea in 1 Timothy 6:13-16. Jesus lived with courage. He made the confession and lived up to it, and as His disciples, we must do the same. It's not like Jesus is indifferent to what we're doing. Every moment of our lives is exposed to His sight, and He has expectations for every one of them. Nor can we think that if we let Jesus down that He's going to be OK with it, or that we can somehow escape His judgment. Instead, as Paul emphasizes here, the glory and the power of Jesus are overwhelming. He is the King of kings. He is the Lord of lords. There is no one who is on the same level that He is, and when He appears, He will use that authority to judge us. Our only good option is to live blamelessly before Him.

As part of this, Paul issues some special instructions to **THE RICH** who are believers. This appears in 1 Timothy 6:17-19. First, Paul warns against two errors that wealthy Christians can fall into. They can be arrogant, and believe that they're better than others just because they're rich, or they can start trusting in their money instead of trusting in God. As we've already seen, both of those attitudes can only lead to destruction. Instead, rich disciples should use their money like the blessing from God that it is. Just like a good singing voice or a good head for Scripture is a gift, wealth is a gift, and it too should be used to glorify God. Wealthy brethren can contribute more in financial terms to the Lord's work than poor brethren could ever dream of doing. When the rich see other Christians in need, they can reach out and help them. As we've seen before, brethren, all of us are rich in absolute terms, so these are things we all need to be thinking about doing. Obviously, there are costs associated with this. If we give more, maybe we won't be able to take as nice a vacation. Maybe we won't be able to trade in our car every four years. However, we'll be doing something far more important with our money. We'll be laying a foundation for eternal life. Let's be rich in good works.

However, our material wealth, no matter how much of it we possess, is not our most important possession. That's why Paul urges Timothy to turn his attention to **GUARDING THE TRUST**. This concluding section of the letter is found in 1 Timothy 6:20-21. Timothy may well have been poor in material terms, but he was rich in the truth of the gospel. God had entrusted him with the knowledge of eternal life, and it was Timothy's foremost responsibility to guard that trust. It was easy for Timothy to fail. All he had to do was be seduced by the world of pseudo-intellectualism, get impressed with himself, and start talking like that, and he would betray the trust. He would stray from the faith, and we can stray just as easily today. As disciples, we too have a trust. We have the same eternal word of God, and we may well have it more completely than Timothy did. We know and understand the truth in a way that few others do. We have a responsibility to live it, and we have a responsibility to teach it to others. It's easy for us to fail too. We can be wicked, or we can be silent. However, that would also be a betrayal. Let's live up to God's expectations. Let's guard the trust.