



1 Timothy

RBS
1 Timothy 6:1–21

Lesson 6: Godliness with Gain, Riches with Ruin

“But godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Timothy 6:6).

Doctrinal Focus: *Obsession with money can corrupt and destroy, but godliness with contentment is the fruit of the life of faith.*

Read 1 Timothy 6:1–21.

In this final chapter of Paul’s first letter to Timothy, we encounter a number of different topics, each of which, however, is united by how we handle money and cling to the truth of the gospel. In the end, Paul’s instructions are motivated by the danger of straying from the truth, for some have already *“swerved from the faith”* (verse 21).

Verses 1–2a

Paul begins with the conduct of servants, or even slaves, and how they should regard their work and their masters. First, those who serve a master must honor that master, but not for the sake of propriety or even humility, but for the integrity of the reputation of God and his Word—before both believing and unbelieving masters. Because God is our true and ultimate master, and he has set us free from the bondage of sin and death, we are free to serve those in authority with complete integrity. In fact, we are free in Christ to serve in a way that promotes the good of our leaders over our own good. We are also reminded here that God himself protects and provides for his people, and that every human master lives under the ultimate authority of God, as a steward of the authority with which he or she has been entrusted. Understanding these realities, and then living in light of them, honors God and his Word before the believer and the unbeliever alike. In other words, the way in which we live serves as evidence for that which we believe.

Verses 2b–5

Paul instructs Timothy that he must not only teach those things set before him, but that he must even *“command”* them. The importance of this reality is highlighted by what follows. Those who teach anything different, that is, anything that does not accord with godliness or the sound teaching of Jesus, are full of pride, conceited, and *“understand nothing.”* Remember, one of the major themes that permeates 1 Timothy is the danger of the false teachers and their demonic teachings within the local church. In verses 4–5, Paul sets forth a daunting description of these false teachers. They crave controversy and quarrels. They promote envy, dissension, slander, suspicion, and constant arguing within the church. People like this have minds that are corrupt and imagine godliness to be a means of financial gain or profit. The corruption of false teaching comes from the corruption of the false teacher’s heart and mind. Both the false teacher and his false teachings are rotten, and they both bear rotten fruit.

Verses 6–10

Paul will now set things straight. Godliness is *not* a means of gain. Rather, godliness with contentment is the gain. Godliness with contentment is its own reward; the fruit of faith, the produce of good doctrine, the yield of the obedience of faith. Just as the apostle states so clearly, *“there is great gain in godliness with contentment”* (verse 6). Why is this so? Consider human life, especially our birth and death. We enter the world with nothing, and we

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also depart this world with nothing. Because this is true, the significance of life must consist of more than material possessions and wealth. According to the author of Ecclesiastes, a life lived “*under the sun*,” only in pursuit of material wealth, is a life of total vanity. It is completely empty and meaningless. Consider for example, the staggering words of Ecclesiastes 2:1-11:

I said in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself.” But behold, this also was vanity. I said of laughter, “It is mad,” and of pleasure, “What use is it?” I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine—my heart still guiding me with wisdom—and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the children of man to do under heaven during the few days of their life. I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house. I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem. I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man. So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

Paul challenges the Christian to be content with food and clothing, the basics of life. An unhealthy desire for riches is a source of great temptation and potentially of spiritual ruin. For some, it may even result in the rejection of the faith. If you doubt this

reality, consider someone as wise as Solomon. In 1 Kings 11:1-8, there is recorded the greatness of his riches, the vastness of his kingdom, and the obscene number of wives he had taken. And this is the conclusion to the matter from 1 Kings 11:9-11:

And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods. But he did not keep what the LORD commanded. Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, “Since this has been your practice and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant.”

If Solomon, with all of his wisdom, could not maintain his faith in God due to his pursuit of wealth and pleasure, then how can we expect to be safe from the same dangers?

Verses 11-16

And so how do we combat the temptations occasioned by wealth and riches? If life is not about the pursuit of material possessions, then what is it about? How should we live? Paul answers these questions in this next section. We must run, fight, and cling! This is not the passive exhortation to “let go and let God” that has become so popular in many sections of the evangelical world. No, the Christian life is a life of struggling and striving to rest in the good news of the gospel, and to live in light of that gospel. We must fight to believe, and struggle to rest!

We must flee from any unhealthy desire for wealth or riches. But this flight is not satisfying in and of itself. No, we must also pursue after the true riches of this present life. According to Paul, these are “*righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, and gentleness*” (verse 11). These things constitute the rich fruit of godliness that produce the great gain of contentment in the life of the believer by the power of the Spirit of God who dwells in us. By pursuing these things in Christ, we come to “*fight the good fight*” and, as such, come to possess eternal, true, and abundant life, because it

is God himself "*who gives life to all things*" (verse 13). We must continue in this fight until Christ returns to finally destroy his enemies, gather his people, and usher forth the new heavens and earth (cf. Revelation 21). Then, and only then, will God's people be fully satisfied, fully content, and eternally vindicated for their faith and life in this corrupted, broken, and perishing world. And we will find this satisfaction in Christ alone—"*who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen*" (1 Timothy 6:15b-16). God is the gospel, and he is our great reward (cf. Genesis 15:1).

Verses 17-19

But what about those who do in fact possess material wealth and great riches within the church, are they lost, without hope? By no means! Paul's warnings and admonitions in the previous section are aimed at those who have an unhealthy desire to accumulate material riches beyond their needs, as a substitute for the pursuit of godliness, even idolatry. What then should the wealthy do with their wealth? First, the rich must not place their hope in wealth, but rather in God, who gives all things for our benefit and enjoyment. Second, they must use their wealth in a manner that makes them wealthy in good works. Good works of this type are characterized by Paul as generosity and the sharing of resources. In other words, the rich have the great honor of making others rich by means of their own generosity. By doing this, those rich in material goods will make themselves rich in heavenly treasure, taking hold of the realities of that life which begins with eternity, the true and better life. This complies precisely with the teaching of Jesus on the same topic. Jesus taught, "*Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth,*

where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19-21).

Verses 20-21

Finally, Paul brings this letter to a conclusion with a personal and affectionate charge to his young friend, colleague, and disciple in the Lord. Timothy is charged to "*guard the deposit entrusted*" to him. It is difficult to know exactly what Paul means by the good deposit, but we do have some help from Paul's second letter to Timothy, where we find a similar exhortation—"*By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you*" (2 Timothy 1:14). In the context of 2 Timothy 1, the contents of this deposit are described as "*the testimony about our Lord*" and "*the gospel*" (verse 8). This gospel testimony is further characterized as the power of God's grace in Jesus who has abolished death and brought life and immortality (verses 9-10). In other words, Timothy is to guard, protect, and promote the purity and centrality of the gospel in his ministry. The false teachers have either rejected or minimized the good news about Jesus and replaced it with "*irreverent babble*" and "*contradictions*" which some might consider knowledge (1 Timothy 6:20). But true knowledge, knowledge that changes and shapes all of life, begins and ends with the gospel of Jesus Christ, that "*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Like a protective father, Paul longs for the purity of the local church by the power of the gospel that shapes and defines all of life. Similarly, he is sternly opposed to any such corruptions that may inflict harm on the local church family.

Recommended Commentary

1 Timothy by Phillip Ryken (Reformed Expository Commentaries)



1 Timothy Lesson 6

Questions for Discussion

Read 1 Timothy 6:1–21.

1. Why does Paul command servants to serve their masters well? What enables those under authority to serve well those in authority?
2. How would this command of Paul's apply to other areas of life—children with parents, students with teachers, employee with employer, even husbands and wives? Is there a principle at work here that can apply to all of these relationships?
3. In what way does the way in which we behave in life serve as evidence for what we truly believe and value?
4. How does Paul contrast the false teachers in verses 2–5 with a life of godliness in verses 6–10? What are the major differences?
5. What is the value of godliness in the Christian life? What is godliness?
6. How does Ecclesiastes 2 help us to measure the value and importance of material possessions in this life? What do we learn from the life of Solomon in 1 Kings 11 about the danger of pursuing material possessions and pleasure apart from God?
7. In verses 11–16, how does Paul encourage us to combat the temptations of material possessions in this life? What does this struggle look like?

8. According to Paul, what are the true riches of the Christian life? Where can these riches be found?

9. What is the truest and greatest reward of the Christian life? In what way is this true and how does it sustain the believer in the midst of the struggles and difficulties of this life?

10. Are riches and wealth evil? Do they always corrupt? Are all wealthy people doomed to sin and death?

11. According to Paul and Jesus, how should the rich invest their wealth? How should the local church invest its resources? What is the motivation for investing resources in a godly, biblical manner? See Matthew 6:19-21.

12. Consider your own resources, graciously provided to you by God himself. How will you express your own gratitude to God for all his gracious provision to you, even the basic essentials of food and clothing?

13. What is the “*good deposit*” that Timothy must guard? Why is this stewardship so crucially important to Timothy’s ministry and the health of the local church?

14. How would you summarize the basic message of 1 Timothy? What are the major issues and important topics? How has studying this book changed how you view leadership, doctrine, godliness, and community in the local church?