

1 Timothy 6

Basic Outline

- I. Resist the entitlement mentality (6:1-2).
- II. Avoid controversy, flee from greed, and pursue godliness (6:3-16).
- III. Command the rich to be rich in good deeds (6:17-19).
- IV. Guard true doctrine (6:20-21).

Issues for Discussion

1. **“All who are under the yoke of slavery...” (6:1-2)** – Paul counseled Christian slaves to fully respect their non-Christian masters so that people would not slander God’s Name or the apostles’ teaching. As odious as slavery was, the cause for abolishing it did not rise to the level of disrupting their Gospel witness to the culture, which accepted it. Even within the Church, slavery was not directly attacked. If you read Paul’s letter to Philemon, who was a slave owner, you will notice the diplomacy with which Paul appealed to him with respect to his runaway slave, Onesimus. Also, slavery in New Testament times was different from the kind of slavery that existed in modern history. Not race but politics (slaves of war) and economics (poverty-induced slavery) were the primary causes.

Rather than railing against the institution of slavery, Paul focused on the attitudes and actions of Christian slaves and Christian masters within the context of slavery.

Christian slaves were to fully respect and sincerely obey their masters, not to steal from them, nor to talk back to them, but to demonstrate complete trustworthiness (cf. Ephesians 6:5-8; Colossians 3:22-25; Titus 2:9-10). Various reasons were given for this: (1) for a witness to unbelievers: “so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive” (Titus 2:10); (2) because of God’s reward: “because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free” (Ephesians 6:8; Colossians 3:24-25). Christian slaves were not to take their Christian masters for granted just because they were fellow believers. Instead, they were to “serve them even better” (1 Timothy 6:2).

Christian masters were to treat their slaves righteously and fairly just as they would expect from God, their heavenly Master (Colossians 4:1; Ephesians 6:9). They were expected to be “devoted to the welfare of their slaves” (1 Timothy 6:2).

Today, we look askance at any and every kind of slavery, because we believe in the dignity of every human being as created equally by God and in the image of God. We also believe in the equal redemptive worth of every believer because in Christ there is “neither slave nor free...for [we] are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). Consequently, the abolition of slavery was achieved by Christians, like William Wilberforce in England and Abraham Lincoln in America. Even way before them, the apostle Paul wrote to Philemon, the Christian slave owner, with respect to his runaway slave, Onesimus, who also became a believer, that he should receive him “no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother,” adding, “He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord” (Philemon 16).

Resist the Entitlement Mentality: Even so, there is another principle to grasp from Paul's instruction to Christian slaves with respect to their Christian masters. He told them not to disrespect their Christian masters just because they were "fellow believers" (1 Timothy 6:2). On the contrary, they were to serve them even better. Christian slaves were not to feel "entitled" to better treatment, more rights, or the freedom to disrespect their masters, who were their brothers in Christ. No, they were to be even more devoted in serving their masters and less demanding of their rights. This would make the job of Christian masters, who were commanded to treat fairly and care for their slaves, even easier. This would also make the witness of Christian slaves and masters to their unbelieving counterparts even stronger. Such an attitude and such actions would differentiate them from the typical discordant slave to master relationship. Rather than slander, there would be respect for "God's name and [the apostles'] teaching" (1 Timothy 6:1).

Do we have an entitlement mentality? Do we damage our witness by not being good citizens of our country? Do we honestly and conscientiously pay what is due with respect to our taxes? Do we work hard at our jobs and resist the temptation to take unethical advantage of our companies, like taking office supplies for our own personal use? Are we diligent, responsible, sincere, and completely trustworthy at our jobs, in the payment of our rent or mortgage or payments on our credit cards? Do we prioritize spiritual gain over temporary advantage? In other words, is our primary motivation what will most benefit me or WHAT WILL MOST GLORIFY GOD?!

2. **"These are the things you are to teach and insist on..." (1 Timothy 6:2b)** – Both the *NIV* and *ESV* associate these words with what follows rather than what precedes and adds a section title that introduces something different from what was addressed in 1 Timothy 6:1-2a. This is unfortunate because it confuses the reader and takes away from Paul's emphasis on his instruction to Christian slaves. Paul wanted Timothy not simply to accept his instructions but also to decidedly and firmly teach it to the church at Ephesus. This was very similar to what he did in 1 Timothy 4:6, where he wrote, "If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus." Paul was giving specific instructions that he expected Timothy to faithfully relay to the believers in the church.

"If anyone teaches otherwise..." (1 Timothy 6:3) – Paul foresaw objectors to his instructions and asserted that his teaching was what was consistent with "the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ" and "godly teaching." Perhaps he was thinking of well-known sayings of Christ, like "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's" or "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" or "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves, take up their cross daily, and follow Me" or "But I say to you, do not resist an evil person" or "But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." The spirit of Jesus's teaching was consistent with Paul's principle of not insisting on one's rights but voluntarily surrendering them for the sake of the kingdom of God.

Paul criticized "those who teach otherwise" as being conceited (lit. raising smoke) and understanding nothing. These people were all smoke and no fire, all talk and no substance, headlines without truth. Paul went on to describe these people: "They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between people of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the

truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain” (1 Timothy 6:4-5). In other words, these people simply want to get a rise out of others (e.g. sensational headlines serving as click bait on news sites). They thrive on creating divisiveness, encouraging class warfare by stirring up envy and stoking controversy. Rather than promoting unity and harmony they encourage suspicion, strife and conflict. They are not interested in truth, but they will use the pretense of godliness (i.e. pretend to be godly) in order to take advantage of gullible people and enrich themselves.

So what is the proper attitude toward money? If Paul were writing a contemporary bestseller, he might write in between verses 5 and 6, “I’m glad you asked.”

3. **“But godliness with contentment is great gain...” (1 Timothy 6:6-10)** – On this topic of money, Paul contrasted two kinds of gain. One kind was material, uncertain and temporary. The other kind was spiritual, certain and eternal. One kind would lead a person into temptation and a trap, stir up foolish and harmful desires in them that would ultimately destroy them. Paul wrote, “For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil” (1 Timothy 6:10). Paul did not write that this desire for money was the root of “every kind of evil,” but the expression “all kinds” still suggests a broad spectrum of evil.

The two expressions “those who want to get rich” and “the love of money” are parallel expressions, referring to the same group. The applicable principle is the same: Don’t seek wealth. Don’t try to get rich. Don’t run after money. It’s a bad idea, it’s fleeting, and it will bring more harm than good. 1 Timothy 6 is perhaps the strongest Scripture against the pursuit of wealth. Paul argued that the desire for wealth was plagued with temptation and a trap, suggesting pitfalls, both known and unknown, seen and unseen. The desire for wealth was foolish and harmful and destined to bring ruin and destruction to anyone who pursued it.

Consider, also, these other Scriptures:

- Proverbs 23:5 “Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle.”
- Ecclesiastes 5:10 “Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. This too is meaningless.”
- Luke 16:13-15 “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. **You cannot serve both God and money.**’ The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. He said to them, ‘You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts. **What people value highly is detestable in God’s sight.**”
- Matthew 6:19-21 “**Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth**, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”
- James 1:9-11 “Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. **But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower.** For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. **In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business.**”

- James 5:1-3 “Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days.”

The opposite of “wanting to be rich” is not “wanting to be poor.” It is **CONTENTMENT**. What is contentment? Paul answered this in Philippians 4:11-14 while he was in a Roman prison:

I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. **I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation**, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. **I can do all this through him who gives me strength.**

It is not having too much or too little or even just enough. It is not allowing things to take your focus off of your prime objective: to “seek first God’s kingdom and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). Consider what the Prophet Agur wrote in Proverbs 30:7-9, from which came the phrase in the Lord’s Prayer: “Give us this day our daily bread.” Our primary interest should always be that God might give us just what we need to serve Him best.

Now, if God made you wealthy without you ever pursuing it, and you are rich as a gift, coming to you through an inheritance or through hard work or through some fortuitous circumstances, Paul has instructions for you as well in 1 Timothy 6:17-19. You are to be humble, generous, and focused on doing good deeds with your wealth. Let’s jump over there.

4. **“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth...” (1 Timothy 6:17-19)** – The word “command” is the same word used in 1 Timothy 1:3, where Paul instructed Timothy to “command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer.” It means “to charge strictly” (*παράγγελλω* - *Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*). To “command” did not mean to “suggest” or to “recommend” but to order as a command from God. He used the term twice in addressing the rich in 1 Timothy 6:17 and 18.

Paul’s instructions recall the instance of Jesus and the rich young ruler (Matthew 19:1-30; Mark 10:17-31). This young ruler was arrogant, suffering from self-righteousness, believing that he faithfully kept the Law. When Jesus commanded him to sell his possessions and follow Him, the rich young man turned away because he had great wealth. His confidence was not in the Lord but in his wealth. But Jesus asked, “What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?” (Mark 8:36). Jesus also observed, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God” (Matthew 19:24).

Paul told Timothy to command the rich not to be **arrogant** and not to put their hope in wealth because it was so **uncertain** (1 Timothy 6 :17; Proverbs 23:5). James made the same argument, even linking this false sense of security to arrogance:

Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, “If it is

the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil.

The writer of Hebrews conveyed a similar warning against the pursuit of wealth: "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'" Thus, loving money is contrary to trusting God. And if you are trusting God, you will not be pursuing wealth.

Consequently, Paul wrote that instead of trusting money, they should "put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment" (1 Timothy 6:17). Solomon observed, "When the LORD blesses you with riches, you have nothing to regret" (Proverbs 10:22 *CEV*). In other words, what the LORD gives us is pure, right and good and to be enjoyed. Paul expressed this kind of enjoyment of what God gives also in 1 Timothy 4:4, where marriage and food were created by God to be received with thanksgiving. So a distinction needs to be made between the pursuit of possessions and God's gift of possessions. The former is discouraged and a cause for stumbling, while the latter is to be received with thanksgiving and praise to God.

In 1 Timothy 6:18-19, Paul provided the follow up instructions for those who possessed wealth, whatever the source: (1) They were commanded to do good, (2) to be rich in good deeds, (3) to be generous and (4) to be willing to share (1 Timothy 6:18). In other words, their riches were not to be used for their personal enjoyment alone but to benefit others, so that while their material riches would perish at death, their good works would result in eternal treasures that would never perish: "In this way they will lay up treasures for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life" (1 Timothy 6:19). Once again, the contrast is between a shaky, uncertain foundation and "a firm foundation," between "the present age" and "the coming age," between a temporary life and "the life that is truly life" (i.e. eternal life).

Jesus taught this very principle in His Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6:19-21. Earthly treasures (i.e. money) would perish but heavenly treasures (i.e. good works done in faith) would endure.

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also

Again, in Luke 16:9 Jesus taught, "Use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings." By this He meant that money should be used to win souls for Christ. These believers would be the very ones to welcome such a spiritual philanthropist into the eternal dwellings in heaven.

5. **"But you, man of God, flee from all this..." (1 Timothy 6:11-16)** – In contrast to an entitlement mentality and the pursuit of riches, Paul commanded Timothy to FLEE such thinking and aspirations and instead to PURSUE righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. These virtues oscillate between doing good and being good, having a righteous standing and doing good deeds, possessing unswerving conviction and exercising compassionate

correction. These virtues describe the “good fight of the faith,” which Paul would later declare he had fought (2 Timothy 4:7). Remember, that earlier Paul challenged Timothy to “fight the battle well” (1 Timothy 1:18). He was simply reiterating that charge here.

“Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called...” – Paul simply reminded Timothy of his salvation from the point of his conversion and declaration of faith “in the presence of many witnesses” (cf. Romans 10:9-10).

“In the sight of God...” – Paul gave Timothy a solemn charge to “keep this command,” which has immediate reference to Paul’s command to “flee...and pursue” in verse 11. He called God the Father and Christ to be witnesses of this charge. In doing so, he was seeking divine help for Timothy to obey this command, even as he would do in his second letter: “Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you – guard it **with the help of the Holy Spirit** who lives in us” (2 Timothy 1:14).

In encouraging Timothy with this charge, Paul recounted the character and power of God, “who gives life to everything” (i.e. in creating) and the faithfulness of Christ, “who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession” (i.e. in redeeming; cf. Hebrews 12:2-3). Paul did this to anchor his instruction to Timothy on the solid foundation of the character and power of God and the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. Looking forward, Paul reminded Timothy that that same character and power and faithfulness demonstrated in the past would hold true into the future: “until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which God will bring about in his own time – God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and glory forever. Amen” (1 Timothy 6:15-16). On this strong foundation of truth, Paul charged Timothy to obey His command “without spot or blame,” that is, with a clear conscience and a blameless testimony, free from self-condemning guilt and outside accusation.

- 6. “Guard what has been entrusted to your care...” (1 Timothy 6:20-21)** – Paul closed his instructions to Timothy by reminding him to (1) hold on to the true message, the good instructions, and the spiritual gifts he received from Paul and (2) turn away from “godless chatter” (i.e. the legalistic false gospel of the Judaizers) and “the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge (i.e. the human philosophy of the Gnostics). Paul observed that some have “departed from the faith” by professing to believe in these false doctrines. The word translated “departed” is a Greek word that literally means “to miss the mark.” In other words, they had come short of the truth. We often speak of missing the mark with respect to the sinful condition of man, where people come short of God’s righteous standard: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23) and “We all like sheep have gone astray. Each of us has turned to our own way” (Isaiah 53:6). These false teachers used Gospel lingo, but they came short of Gospel truth. For example, they taught a salvation by works, rather than the biblical salvation by grace alone (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5), or they replaced biblical truth with human philosophy (e.g. Colossians 2:8, 20-23). As Paul began his letter with a warning against false teachers (1 Timothy 1:3), so he closed his letter with the same warning.