

Week Six: 1Tim 6:2-21
“You Cannot Serve Two Masters”

1Ti 6:2-21 (ESV) ... Teach and urge these things. 3 If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, 4 he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, 5 and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.

6 But godliness with contentment is great gain, 7 for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. 8 But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. 9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

11 But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. 12 Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 13 I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, 14 to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 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.

17 As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. 18 They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, 19 thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

20 O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called “knowledge,” 21 for by professing it some have swerved from the faith. Grace be with you.

I think the way Paul structures this closing section of this letter is fascinating. At the heart of it, in the center paragraph, he gives Timothy the title “Man of God” and he tells Timothy to flee and pursue at the same time. It is a charge to do the very best we can today because of the great hopes of the future. Paul is telling Timothy not only to turn your back on everything the world values as most important, but to flee from it. Run as fast as you can! What is the pursuit? Certainly not a dream. It is the reality of a promise that is based on everything the Scriptures teach, going all the way back to creation. Paul is certain of this, so certain he disregards the dangers and the threats he faces every day.

Before Paul gets to the heart of it, though, he lays out the problem. Actually there are two problems that plague the Ephesian Church, and these two things will the sow seeds of destruction in the church going forward for all time. They are Knowledge and Money. We all know the expression: Knowledge is Power. Go to any University in the

world and they will tell you that. And what does it take to get the power of Knowledge? Money. The money that we are willing to spend for knowledge tells us its value. And what does this Knowledge do for us once we get it? It gives us the power to make more Money. And endless feedback loop that in the world's eyes is the path of upward mobility. But in the realm of God's Kingdom it is a spiral down into darkness. But the two things he warns are also our greatest assets. How can Knowledge and Money be both a curse and a blessing? It all depends on how we use the things God gives us. Money can be used to finance good works to lead people to the salvation Jesus died to provide. Knowledge of the Scriptures is what Timothy will use to explain who Jesus is. God gave him the ability to learn and teach and Paul tells him *"This is the deposit entrusted to you."* God trusts him with this gift, to use it wisely, even in his weakness.

In this ingenious way Paul has structured this final set of exhortations after he says *Teach and urge these things*. Let's look at the details and gain as much knowledge as we can. With that knowledge the Lord can make us wise as we face the decisions of life and death. The book of Proverbs says money is important but *Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding, for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold. She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. (Prov 3:13-15)*. Wisdom is a beautiful woman.

Paul picks up where he started the letter. There are false teachers in Ephesus posing as Christians, and some of them may even be Christians who have gotten off track. They are promoting "different" doctrine and not sound healthy doctrine. Paul's accusation is they do not teach what Jesus taught and their teaching does not lead to behavior that is consistent with the teachings of Jesus. The balance of teaching and godliness is the message in this letter. What is the effect of teaching that does not lead to godliness and wisdom? It puffs us up with pride and we think we know a lot but Paul says we really understand nothing. Out of that conceit we develop this unhealthy craving not just for controversy, but for power. Why do I say power? Because my different ideas can create a kind of distinctive that, if appealing enough, can gain a following. I can become popular and out of popularity comes fame and after that money starts flowing in from any and all who agree with me. My new twist on the Gospel can make me rich! So when Paul says these people have a *"craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions..."* and *constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth*, he means this is a really bad thing. But for the one who has a twisted imagination, and is as crafty as a serpent, he fantasizes "There is money in religion! There's gold in them thar' hills!" People will follow. As P.T. Barnum said so well: "There's a sucker born every minute!" The real damage in all this is to the Church. It fractures and divides the Body of Christ from the inside, and it is a terrible reflection of Christ to the outsiders looking in. They see religion as "all about money" because they are reading the hearts of these hucksters correctly, who actually are *imagining that godliness is a means of gain (6:5)*. This is where a good translation of this word could be religion, because they have turned godliness into something that is not godly, merely "religious." Paul wants to correct that.

But godliness with contentment is great gain... (6:6) True godliness is not a desire for power and wealth but a desire to live a Gospel-shaped life, which is a life of great gain. We do not enter this life because of what we know or how much we have, but it the realization of how much we don't have. We are born with nothing. No knowledge, no wealth, not even any clothes (except for that little hat—all babies have those cute

little hats). The wise man confesses that anything he has comes from God, and when he dies he will leave it all behind. The wise man is grateful for what he has, no matter how much or how little. That is contentment. Contentment is not natural, but neither is it just a personality trait for a few special Christians. It is something we learn if we are willing to seek it. Even Paul had to learn it: *Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. (Phil 4:11)*. It is a process toward a goal as we learn to depend on Jesus as our Lord. *But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. (6:8)* If Paul had to learn this, then it is certain that we have to learn it as well. The opposite of contentment is a desire to be rich, to have more than the basics, to gather more for myself. It is greed. Greed blinds us in a way that plunges headlong into darkness and destruction. Paul calls it a snare, a trap. What is ironic, it is a trap we set for ourselves! *These men lie in wait for their own blood; they set an ambush for their own lives. Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain... (Prov 1:18-19)* Greedy people want more, not caring how they get it. That is true of Christians. *It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. (6:10)* Craving. It is like a sharp stake at the bottom of a trap that impales us and pierces us to the heart. It is a wound that deadens the soul but we live on with the cravings we can never fully satisfy. The craving for knowledge becomes conceit and a puffed up mind, and the craving for riches begets corruption and pockets stuffed with cash. And we wander off into oblivion.

Paul now describes a different way to live, the way to a real life found in the King who will one day return for us in *the appearing*—the dazzling light of HIs coming. The *epiphany* of our Lord Jesus the King. The is the second Epiphany. The first one Paul recited in the first line of the poem in 3:16 *he was “epiphanied” (revealed) in the flesh*. The night of His birth thousands of angels pierced the darkness with the glory of heaven. But this time the Glory is Jesus, *...who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords*, and the brilliant and blinding glory of heaven will not just pierce the darkness, but overtake it and lead us into a new age that will have no end. This future hope *“encourages us to lift up our heads and see where we’re called to go, rather than looking around at the rest of the world and being consumed with jealousy for the material wealth that others have got.”¹*

Paul speaks directly to Timothy and says *O man of God*. This a formal address, a title to a man in God’s service. We find this title only twice in the New Testament. Both times it is Timothy, once here and again in 2 Timothy. Of the 76 times it is used in the Old Testament, it is used more than 50 times for Elijah and Elisha, the most powerful prophets in the history of Israel. Paul has charged Timothy with the leadership of the most influential church on all of Asia, and he will tell him to pass his authority on to faithful men who will carry the blessing into the future. Does he have Elijah and Elisha in mind as he addresses Timothy in this way? Paul as Elijah passing “the mantle” of sonship to Timothy, his “true son in the faith”? His Elisha?

Paul gives Timothy a series of commands, the first two seem contradictory, others have a military flavor to them. He says *flee* the cravings of knowledge for knowledge sake and the cravings for wealth and riches. But at the same time *pursue righteousness*, meaning justice, *godliness*, as we have already seen means behavior, *faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness*. These last four are inner virtues that are the motivation for justice and godly behavior. This is *fruit of the Spirit*. Nourishment and life for the world around us. We are fleeing as we are pursuing. Think of being on the street and confronted by someone with a knife who wants rob you. You turn and run and a

half block away you see a bus just pulling away, and you run with all of your strength, your only focus is to catch *THAT BUS!* Then you will be safe. Saved! That is the world we are in. Evil is always in pursuit, either from within or without. That is why Jesus said to pray *“Father who is in heaven...please deliver us from [the] evil [one]”* We are asking for deliverance today, looking forward to the ultimate deliverance when *“Your Kingdom comes and Your will is done on earth as in heaven...”* As we run we also *fight*. We *fight the GOOD fight of FAITH. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called...(6:12)* Fight and take hold is the way we have it in the ESV, and that is the military analogy. We are in a battle against a powerful enemy. But there is another way to view it. The word means struggle as in a contest as well as a fight. I like the way the GNB carries the idea of *running* from the previous commands: *flee and pursue*. It says *Run your best in the race of faith, and win eternal life for yourself, it was to this life that God called you...* The Moody Church in Chicago has a podcast called *Running To Win...* that expresses this idea. But whether we see this as a war or a race, it is a struggle. And we have been called by the King. We fight in His army but it is a *noble fight*. There are no guns or swords, there is no killing. Our weapons are love and gentleness. When Timothy he signed on in the beginning he made a *confession before many witnesses*. (6:13) He was baptized publicly and vowed allegiance to Jesus as Lord. Paul now calls the greater witnesses as he reaffirms Timothy to take command of the Church. The stakes are higher now. He calls God the Creator and Jesus the Advocate, who stood and confessed he is the Messiah, the true King, before Pontius Pilate. The point of all this is to pursue godliness and sound teaching, justice and the virtues of character. This is not accidental, it is intentional. We entered into this relationship, this army or race, by the baptism into a new life. We have to want and desire to live that life. The life of the coming age in the present, anticipating the glory to come. It is not how much or little we accomplish, because Paul say it is not for us. He says *To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen. (6:16)* And some days the very best we can do is just to hold on. And with that our Father is pleased. And Paul says *AMEN*. But he’s not done! Paul does that. He will say *“Finally...”* and then go on for another two pages. He has left a question hanging out there that he must answer.

What do I do if I am rich? There are people with a lot of money. More money than they need to live and sometimes more money than they will ever spend. Most of us have an excess that we stash away for that far off rainy day. That’s not bad in itself. It is the attitude in our hearts about our money that the Lord sees. Paul gives Timothy a series of commands. Not for him, but for the church. I will simply list them:

Do not to be arrogant about being rich

Do not to put your hope in your wealth

Do hope in God. He gave you your wealth

Do GOOD

Be rich in good deeds

Be liberal and generous in your community

See What Paul has done? He was very harsh in his judgment of teachers who use their so-called knowledge of the Bible as a way to get rich. This is greed of the worst kind. It is the kind of greed that Jesus condemned when he saw it in the Pharisees. In Ephesus, as in Jerusalem there were many wealthy people, just as there are today. Paul has already made it clear he wants the women of stature, those who adorn themselves in a way that flaunts their wealth, to humble themselves and to do good works. (2:9-10) The false teachers certainly saw these women easy marks.

Now he telling men the same thing. What Paul does so skillfully is to give wealth its proper place. It is not money itself that is evil, it is how we use our money. In fact, that is the question. Does money serve us or do we serve money? Paul does not want to paint rich people as wicked just because they are rich. He says use your money to serve and further God's Kingdom. Do good works. Here is the secret that the kingdom of this world will never understand. The good works we do and the ways we use our money to serve others, will become the foundation of our future. We will never lose it. In fact, it is not until we get to look back on it through the eyes of Jesus do we get to see the full impact of the treasures that we offered to him and how He used them for His Father's Glory. Money can never buy contentment. But money can buy life. Not life for ourselves, but for others. We already have the down payment of the resurrected life living within us and that is the life Jesus wants us to live now. He told a parable to make the point. There was a dishonest servant who used his master's wealth to secure a future for himself, which of course, is wrong on so many levels. But Jesus used that unrighteous servant to make a point: *"And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings."* (Lu 16:9. See the parable in Luke 16:1-13) Disciples can use money to help people understand and believe our message.² We will meet those very people someday and see how our money and good works influenced and led them to this new life in Christ. Think of the joy we will share in that Assembly of the Eternal City. That is why Paul tells us, in fact commands us, *"... to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share with others."* (6:18) Paul understands the future result better than we do, *"...so that they may take hold of that which is truly life."* (6:19). Paul trusts God with everything God has given him, because he is certain *"...we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."* (Eph 2:10) Paul is looking forward to that day when he can see exactly what God had already prepared. We should be too!

Paul says *Oh Timothy!* I hear this as a term of endearment, much as he called him before *Oh Man of God!* Paul wants Timothy to succeed, to stand firm and to be an Elijah in his ministry. He tells Timothy to *guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called "knowledge..."* Paul knows God has given Timothy a great gift, one of knowledge and insight and the ability to teach. But pride hides in our hearts, lurking like a beast. Knowledge can make us think we are smarter than we really are. We become *"wise in our own eyes"* and we begin to shut God out. Our desire to be right at all costs kills relationships with those who love us the most. And who loves us most of all? Jesus. And when we shut Him out? When we think we *"know it all"*? We will *swerve from the faith* and go over the edge into the darkness, wondering where it all went wrong. *Grace [be continually] with you.*

"Twas Grace that taught my heart to fear, and Grace my fears relieved!"³

Father, you have given each of us gifts and talents we did not earn or merit. We pray we take Paul's command seriously and guard what you have given us. To do that we need your grace to teach us and to strengthen us. Grace means gratitude. If we keep gratitude ahead of greed, and give grace prominence in our lives, we can protect ourselves as we run to you for refuge, we can be generous as we depend on you for our need, we can run and persevere as we grasp your hand. This pleases you, and you delight in us, and we delight in your Son, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Main Resource: Tom Wright's *New Testament For Everyone. The Pastoral Epistles*. Westminster John Knox Press 2011

¹ Wright, Tom. *New Testament For Everyone. The Pastoral Epistles. 1&2 Timothy and Titus* Westminster John Knox Press 2011 p.75

² Walvoord, J. and Zuck, R. (Editors) *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Luke* John Martin Ph.D. New Testament Victor Books. 1st Edition. July 1983 p.201

³ John Newton. *Amazing Grace*. 1779