



A Study of 1st & 2nd Timothy

1st Timothy 6:3-10 Greed and Contentment...

I am reading from 1st Timothy chapter six, verses three through ten. If you're using one of the pew Bibles, the passage is located on page 993...1st Timothy 6:3-10

This is what God's Word says:

ESV 1 Timothy 6:3...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.

I have been making the point over the course of our study in 1st Timothy that the letter itself was written by the Apostle Paul to his younger son in the ministry, Timothy, to encourage him to stay on in Ephesus. Paul wanted Timothy to go there, to stay there, and to fight it out with the false teachers that had become squatters in the church. They had done so in an attempt to take over the ministry in Ephesus. Their motivation for wanting to do so has been somewhat unclear up until now but today's text in fact makes it clear that their real motivation for wanting to take over in Ephesus was in fact nothing more than old-fashioned greed. You can see that for yourselves at the end of verse 5. Paul uses there a wonderfully simple and descriptive phrase to sum up the gummed up reasoning of the false teachers there at Ephesus.

ESV 1 Timothy 6:5...they *imagine* that godliness is a means of gain.

You can see Paul's point? He wants Timothy to stand against these false teachers because underneath it all they have deluded themselves into their thinking that godliness is somehow a means of great financial gain...of obtaining and growing their personal wealth.

And because that was the way they reasoned, Paul wanted Timothy to stand against them, to fight it out with them...to turn them out...or at very least to turn them back. He wanted Timothy to do that because Paul feared that the gospel itself was very much in danger of being forever lost there in Ephesus.

And I think on that basis alone we can draw an application from Paul's point even before we fully dive into the text and this is it, **"It is very easy for the issue of money to cloud over the truth and beauty of the gospel."** I think we know that

instinctively and yet I think perhaps we should have already guessed that that was the point Paul was coming to. I say that because over the course of his letter, Paul has invoked a very special piece of concrete imagery to encourage Timothy to fight it out with the false teachers there in Ephesus. The imagery that Paul uses compares the gospel, not just the church itself, but the gospel to a wonderful treasure. He wants Timothy, in fact, to see himself as an ever mindful guard posted there in Ephesus to protect the treasure of the gospel. Paul uses that particular imagery, the imagery of the gospel as treasure, four times in his letters to Timothy.

Let me just remind you of two instances where he does.

First of all, Paul uses the metaphor of guarding treasure at the end of 1st Timothy...1st Timothy 6:20.

ESV 1 Timothy 6:20...O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you.

Secondly, he repeats the idea and the exact same imagery at the beginning of 2nd Timothy...2nd Timothy 1:14.

ESV 2 Timothy 1:14...By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

You see what I mean.

The idea is that Paul as an apostle has been entrusted with the stewardship of the gospel and he wants Timothy as his official representative, as his stand-in, to take up the task in his place...and in doing so to guard the treasure of the gospel that

Paul has entrusted to him. Now the fascinating thing to me about that particular piece of imagery...the imagery of the gospel being a treasure to be guarded...is that it seems transparently clear that the false teachers there in Ephesus also thought of the gospel or perhaps better the church as a treasure. They did not, of course, believe the gospel was treasure to be guarded. They thought it was a treasure to be plundered.

I think the false teachers at Ephesus saw the potential riches of the church at Ephesus as a sort of golden goose. I think they believed that if they could take the reins of the church at Ephesus they might lay claim to its seemingly endless supply of golden eggs.

I suppose in that sense they were not much different than Simon the Magician in Acts 8. Do you know the story? Turn there for a moment. It is such a great story and such a wonderful illustration of the pervasive nature and danger of greed.

^{ESV} **Act 8:9**...But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. ¹⁰ They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, "**This man is the power of God that is called Great.**" ¹¹ And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. ¹² But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. ¹³ Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed. ¹⁴ Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, ¹⁵ who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶ for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, *he offered them money,* ¹⁹ saying, "**Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may**

receive the Holy Spirit." ²⁰ But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! ²¹ You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. ²² Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³ For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity."

You see what I mean?

Simon was eaten up with the desire to obtain the Holy Spirit and the power that flowed from him. He wanted that power so badly that he even offered the Apostles money in order to get it. I think underneath it all that Simon wanted the power to dispense the Holy Spirit in order to make money. He wanted to be able to do so as a part of a greater marketing plan to promote his brand. I can just see Simon envisioning the money that would pour in once he had the ability to dispense the gift of the Spirit of God as he chose.

What is clear I think is that the one common element to both Simon and the false teachers at Ephesus was their greed.

Still, I suppose we ought not to get too far ahead of Paul but rather to take his argument as he chooses to lay it out. Let's do that by picking up the text in 1st Timothy 6:3.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 6:3**...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.

Now when Paul uses the phrase "**a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ**" is he referring to the heretical teaching

of the false teachers there in Ephesus. He is not simply referring back to what he has just said in verses one and two about Christian slaves. He is referring to a good deal more than that.

So what is he referring to?

A number of commentators think that Paul is referring specifically to the words spoken by the Lord Jesus himself. That is, they think he is referring to the heretic's disagreement with the specific words that Jesus himself spoke. And you can see, I think, why they would think that. The text does say, "**who do not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ.**" It almost sounds as if Paul is limiting his concern about the false teachers at Ephesus to the times and places where they disagree with the doctrine contained in the very words that Jesus himself spoke.

I came out of a tradition that more or less held the words of Jesus in red in our Bibles were in some sense more inspired than the regular words that were in black. They are not, of course, any more inspired than the rest of the Bible. All of the words of the Bible are equally authoritative...all equally inspired. But you can see where a person not thinking rightly about the inspiration of Scripture might think that Jesus actual words were more important than say the words of Isaiah the prophet. But, of course, they're not.

Besides, there are a couple of hints in the text that argue against the idea that Paul is limiting his thought here only to the words that Jesus himself spoke.

First of all, there is no article, no "**the**", before the phrase "**sound words**" in the Greek New Testament. The Greek New Testament says, "**who do not agree with sound words (or wholesome words) of our Lord Jesus Christ.**" The ESV does a

bit of an interpretative translating when it adds the word “**the**” in the English text. I make that point because the absence of the article means that Paul is not simply referring to something that the Lord Jesus himself said but rather to the whole content of the revelation God has given both by and about Christ.

J.N.D. Kelly writes this:

For these reasons it seems more satisfactory to take *the phrase* 'sound words' the denote *the overall* Christian message. *It* is broadly equivalent to the teaching which accords with the gospel. Paul then defines this message as that of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring out that its ultimate source is Christ himself and that he is its theme.¹

Philip Ryken explains it like this:

This phrase may refer to the apostolic teaching about Jesus, or it may refer to Jesus own words as recorded in the Gospels. It may even refer to both, since, as John Stott reminds us, "**Paul regarded his own words as the words of Christ**". In any case, "**the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ**" comprise the Christian gospel. This gospel teaches that Jesus is the one and only Son of God, man as well as God, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary, who suffered and died on the cross of Calvary, who was buried in a tomb, and who was raised again from the dead to give eternal life to everyone who believes in him. This is the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ; everything else is unsound.²

You see what I mean.

Anyway, as Paul comes to the conclusion of his letter to Timothy, he wants Timothy to see the importance of standing against the false teachers at Ephesus. He wants Timothy to fight a never ending battle against those that try to subvert the truth of the gospel. Now making his point Paul gets rather blunt in his

language. He says that those who teach a different doctrine...those who possess a teaching different than that which accords with godliness...those who teach something different than the doctrine which he and the other apostles were given by the Holy Spirit...those people are in fact, **“puffed up with conceit and understand nothing.”** They are a bunch of swollen, puffy-cheeked, arrogant nitwits.

John Stott says that basically what Paul is saying is that these false teachers are **“conceited idiots.”**

That’s pretty harsh language.

It is the kind of language that we don’t like very much as moderns. Academics even have a label for it. They call it an *ad hominem* attack. It is the kind of response a person sometimes resorts to when they can’t come up with anything else to say. You know what I mean. It is the kind of thing we sometimes do or say when a person has gotten the better of us in an argument. We get so flustered that we resort to something very personal...something like, **“Well, of course, only an idiot would believe that.”**

Almost everyone agrees that such attacks are not just wrong, but that they are always wrong.

What’s funny is that Paul apparently didn’t think so. Apparently, Paul didn’t think it was wrong to say dreadful things about those who messed the gospel. I think you could even say that the Lord Jesus himself was not categorically opposed to using this sort of excessively descriptive language. I mean he did call the Pharisees

whitewashed tombs and poisonous vipers. I for one am not about to say he was wrong in doing so. Sometimes something has to be said.

Anyway, what we'll see in verse four and five is that Paul actually gives two reasons for lambasting those who purposely messes with the gospel.

First of all, he is going to say that such false teachers do an enormous amount of damage in Christ's church. That is, Paul is going to describe the sinful behavior that goes along with their false doctrine. Secondly, he is going to say that they are willing to do all of the damage they do because they are pushed along by an overwhelming lust for personal gain. That is, they have deluded themselves into thinking their false doctrine will somehow lead to their own financial and material prosperity.

Look down to the second half of verse 4.

ESV 1 Timothy 6:4b...He (that is the one that teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness) 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.

You see Paul's point. Such teachers are destructive. Such teachers are provocateurs.

Such teachers want to pick a fight. They want to quarrel about words. And in wanting to do so they are willing to produce discord, to stir up factions, to create suspicion, to foster friction among those who don't know the truth and who couldn't think right even if they did.

Why do they do that?

They do that because they somehow envision that in the end that their destructive behavior will allow them to turn a dime. They want to break off for themselves a niche market among the people of God. They want to do so for whatever financial gain their own form of **“godliness”** will bring them. In other words, they view the disquieting of the Body of Christ as a chance to make a buck.

Now to be perfectly fair, Paul has already said in 1st Timothy that overseers who work hard at their teaching and preaching deserve to be paid for their labors. You’ll remember he said that back in 1st Timothy 5:17 where he said, **“Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. ¹⁸ For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer deserves his wages.’** But in doing so, Paul has in mind teachers who are faithful to the gospel...who rightly divide the word of truth.

So what Paul is saying here about false teachers is not simply about them being them paid for their labor. John Stott gets it right when he says these false teachers were not really interested in promoting godliness itself. They are not interested in the truth. Rather they were interested in the perversion of godliness especially as it proves to be a financial boon for them.³ To put it simply, they were interested in godliness as a means to an end. They were in it for the money.

I don’t think that surprises any of us all that much. I don’t think any of us are going to cover our mouths and say, **“Oh my, you mean there are people out there that actually subvert the gospel in order to profit themselves?”**

You certainly won't do that if you are a student of the Protestant Reformation at all. During the Reformation, one of the things that came to light over and over again was the entrenched materialism of the Roman Church. It wasn't that there were no good men in the Roman Church. There were plenty of men that genuinely subscribed to a life of poverty and service. There were plenty of good men that held the truth of the gospel. Still, materialism, avarice, and greed had become so institutionalized that men simply began to think of it as a necessary sort of evil. The church became so preoccupied with the accumulation of wealth and all that that entailed that it simply forgot about its one true calling. And the great tragedy of that is that along the way it pretty much lost the gospel.

Men thought in terms of what they could get out of the church rather than in terms of how they might have the privilege of advancing Christ's kingdom.

Take for example the case of Giovanni di Lorenzo de' Medici, Pope Leo X. When he was elected pope in 1513 to take the place of Pope Julius II, he wrote to his brother to say, **"God has granted us the Holy See (the Papacy) and we shall enjoy it."** He then set about to squander in just a matter of just a few months the flush papal treasury left to him by his predecessor Julius. Strapped for cash, Leo stepped up the selling of indulgences **in order** to fill the coffers back up. And then came Luther.

Now we can look back in history and see that sort of greed and avarice and shake our heads all we want but really that sort of penchant toward materialism, that sort of avarice and greed, is every bit as alive today as it was back then.

During the time leading up to the Reformation, the egregious materialism of the church centered around the promised hope of heaven. Today, the church has mostly stopped trying to sell heaven. Today the church has gotten into the business of selling material prosperity in this life.

I remember some thirty-five years ago when I was just getting started in the ministry most charismatic churches focused on the gifts of the Spirit. The hucksters back then were constantly trying to promote the idea that if person gave to their particular ministry, that person would receive some sort of miraculous manifestation of the power of the Spirit. They would be healed of their diseases or receive the gift of speaking in tongues. They would say things like, **“If you’ll give generously to my ministry, I promise I’ll see to it that the Holy Spirit imparts to you some special manifestation of the Spirit.”**

But these days, all that has pretty much been displaced by an even oilier kind of huckster who instead promises health, wealth, and success beyond a person’s wildest dreams. Today’s hucksters say things like, **“If you’ll invest ‘seed money’ in our ministry, God will out of a sense of obligation repay you a hundred times over. In fact, the only imitation to how much you can make is just how much you are willing to invest.”**

Such men and women have made it a standing promise that godliness, by which they mean investing in their ministry, will turn to great gain. You know exactly what I mean. It’s been the persistent mantra of men like Jim Bakker, Jimmy Swaggert, Peter Popoff, Benny Hinn, Eddie Long, Creflo Dollar, and even **“social capitalists”** like Ephren Taylor. But it is really in the end just one huckster after another fleecing God’s sheep to line their own pockets. And what they promise

simply isn't true. I could go on, of course, and share any number of horror stories that have been caused or created by these **"men of the Word"** that attempt to sell prosperity to the ignorant, but I don't want to do that. I don't want to do that because that is not what Paul does. What Paul's does, surprisingly, is to concede the point.

Did you get that?

What Paul does is to concede their point. What Paul does is something like what lawyers sometimes do in trials. You know where one side is trying to establish the rotten character of a defendant. The prosecution wants to bring in witness after witness to disparage the character of a defendant and finally the defense team tries to put an end to the parade of witnesses and says, **"Look, we'll concede the point. Our defendant is a rat. Only we want to make it clear he is just a rat. He's not a murderer."**

Well Paul does something of the same sort of thing here. He concedes the point that godliness is great gain, but he adds a caveat a proviso. He says something like this, **"Yes, it is true. Godliness is great gain. Only it isn't godliness by itself that leads to great gain. It is godliness with contentment that leads to great gain."**

Look at verse six.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 6:6**...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.

Now why do you think Paul feels the need to add the word “**contentment**” to the phrase “**godliness is great gain?**”

I think it is because “**godliness with contentment**” is not the kind of money grubbing godliness the false teachers at Ephesus were interest in. Of course their godliness was not really godliness at all. Godliness with contentment is genuine godliness in that it is interested in godliness for the sake of godliness alone.

Now what I want to do in the time we have left is simply go through what Paul says here and look at the provisos and supporting reasons that Paul adds to his statement that godliness with contentment is great gain.

The first reason that Paul gives for godliness with contentment being great gain is because we brought nothing into the world with us when we came and we are unable to take anything out with us when we go. Now Paul is not promoting the idea that people have some sort of preexistent state before their birth. In fact, his emphasis in the verse is on the word “**nothing.**” In Greek, the way you typically emphasize a word is by moving it forward in the sentence. The first word in verse seven is the word “**nothing.**”

Nothing is what we brought in this world and nothing is exactly what we will be able take out. And if that is true, and of course it is true, shouldn't that cool our jets to own this or that or to incessantly live to possess.

That is why godliness with contentment is great gain.

I remember once hearing J. Vernon McGee tell the story about the death of Cornelius Vanderbilt. Vanderbilt was multi-millionaire who had gained great fortune in the shipping industry. Anyway, when the doctor came out and announced that Mr. Vanderbilt had died one of the reporters asked the doctor, **“And just how much did Mr. Vanderbilt leave behind?”** It was a stupid question, of course, but the doctor never skipped a beat. He simply replied, **“Of well, uh, he...he left it all.”**

I think Paul’s point is that if none of those things we fret over here and now are going to go with us when we die then perhaps we ought not to worry so much about obtaining or retaining them here and now.

Paul poses an alternative in verse eight.

ESV 1 Timothy 6:8...But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.

For Paul the secret to contentment was simplicity. Paul was not against owning property. But he does say, I think, that owning property is not essential to being content. Paul believed that simply having an adequate provision of food to eat and clothes to wear is quite enough.

Paul sounds very much like the Lord Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount where he says:

ESV Matthew 6:19..."Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal,²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

I wonder if I might as one of your pastors just encourage you to think a bit about adding a bit of simplicity to your life. I don't have any real personal motivation to keep you from owning things. I am not saying don't buy this or that but instead give that money to the church. I am not put out that you are able to own or possess nice things. Certainly, many of you are more than financially able to meet all your debts and pay your bills and still be generous. But I wonder if perhaps the desire to possess or own might be causing you a sort of never ending tension that is in many respects completely unnecessary.

That certainly seems to be the direction of Paul's thought in verse nine.

ESV 1 Timothy 6:9...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.

What Paul says here is longing to be rich is a bit like running across a field in which there are any number of hidden pits. One person runs across and falls into a pit called temptation. They were tempted to cut corners or even to be dishonest in their dealings in order to obtain riches and down they went. Another person runs across that same field and gets caught up in a different kind of snare and down they went. And still others fall into other senseless or harmful desires. All of them together wind up plunging ever downward into ruin and destruction. And the reason that all that happens is because the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Notice it is not the only root; it is simply a root. But it is a root of all kinds of evil. There are other roots and there are endless kinds of evil.

Paul's concluding point in the section is that this craving for wealth has caused a number of people to wander away from the faith and that in turn has caused all manner of personal pain and sorrow.

I've seen it in our own denomination.

There have been a number of times when it very nearly happened to me.

In 1986, when I was in what I thought was my last year of seminary, I was driving a 1965 Ford pickup that used a quart of oil a day. One morning I had a Hebrew test. I had studied for the test most of the night and was thoroughly exhausted when I took off for school. About three blocks from school, my radiator hose broke and began to spray water on the engine, which turned immediately into large plumes of white steam. I decided that I didn't want to miss the test, so I just stepped on it. As I pulled into the parking lot my truck was barely visible through the huge clouds of billowing steam. To make things worse, the only parking space I could find was between a new BMW and an almost new Mercedes. Passers by were staring at my steaming truck. I'm sure they were afraid it was about to explode and I am just as sure that were even more afraid that the resulting explosion was going to mess up the two really nice cars on each side of my truck. Anyway, when I got out of my truck I wasn't thinking about the test, or the seminary. I was thinking about those two stupid cars. I wasn't mad that the hose had burst. I wasn't even embarrassed to be driving such a ratty car. I was mad instead that God just did not seem to be doing His part.

"God", I said to myself, "don't you see what I'm trying to do here. I've been busting my butt the last eight years working a full time job, trying to raise my

family on pauper's wages and you give these guys decent cars and rich daddy's to pay their tuition and I'm dying down here. God, I'm trying to advance your kingdom and I deserve better than you're giving."

I left the smoking, simmering remains of my truck on the parking lot and went on to class.

When class was over, I walked out to the parking lot pouting the whole long way. As I approached my truck, I noticed there was a note on my windshield. The thought that somebody had the nerve to write me some kind of hateful, snotty note just made me crazy. I ran over to my car and jerked that note out from under the windshield and looked around glaring to see if I could see who had put the note there. The parking lot was empty and I looked down at the note and it said: **"Do not lay up for yourself treasures upon earth, where hoses break and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. Though in your case, you probably don't have to worry as much as other people do. But lay up for yourself treasures in heaven, for where your treasure is there will your heart be also. Brother, if you need a ride, I get out of class at 10:30. You're doing O.K., stay in the stuff."**

I sat in my truck and cried. I had been focusing on what I didn't have rather than what I actually had. I had lost sight of the high privilege that had been granted to me. I had lost sight of the fact that God had given me the honor of studying His word and that He had also given me a wife and two kids made of stern enough stuff to endure the privilege I had been granted. I had lost sight of the fact that God had always provided just what needed, when I needed it. I had begun to focus on God's apparent approval of others and I had lost sight of His faithfulness to

me. But this brother's note put everything back into perspective. I kept that note in my wallet until it finally just faded away.

I wish I still had it.

Let's pray.

¹ J.N.D. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1960), 134.

² Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy (REC)* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P& R Publishing, 2001), 250.

³ Stott, 148.