

1 Timothy 6:6-19

1Tim. 6:6 Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; 7 for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; 8 but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. 9 But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by 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 evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

1Tim. 6:11 But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. 12 Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 13 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, I charge you 14 to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 which he will bring about at the right time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. 16 It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.

1Tim. 6:17 As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. 18 They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, 19 thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

THE LOVE OF MONEY

Money is the root of all evil ... right? Well, that's almost right.

This is perhaps the most misquoted verse in the Bible. Paul warned Timothy and the early church that the “love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.”

Why is this important? Having a Christian view about money is vital to understanding the nature of faith and the Christian life.

In recent years some have turned the Bible into a kind of Marxist manifesto. They called it Liberation Theology and the idea was this. God is on the side of the poor. God is against the rich. Those who are in power inevitably oppress the poor and so they should be resisted. The church should lead this class struggle.

That's not true, at least not totally true. God is indeed concerned about the poor. God does require righteous and compassionate behavior toward those who are the least and the lost. It is also our responsibility to take this into consideration in all areas of our life, including our politics.

But, the kingdom of God is not about creating a new political order. The kingdom of God is about the creation of a new spiritual order. Jesus told Pilate that my kingdom is not of (or from) this world. (John 18:36)

What does this mean? It means that those who are a part of the Christian kingdom have a unique perspective about things. We take our orders from a higher power. And in this Christian kingdom, a common Savior unites us.

We believe that God is for the world, the whole world and this includes rich, poor, male, female, black, brown, white, Republican and Democrat. God is in the business of transforming the hearts and minds of people, all people. God is in the business of saving the world.

I am suspicious of anyone be they conservative, liberal, Democrat, or Republican who uses religion as a way to advance their political goals. And I am very suspicious of anyone who promotes class warfare and suggests that this is God's will.

SALVATION FOR RICH AND POOR

All we have to do is look at the makeup of the early church, and we learn that the church was by God's design a very diverse group. When the net of God's Spirit came upon that first group of believers, God's first salvation "catch" included people from all over the world. It was truly a multicultural group.

But, more than that, also by God's design, the early church included people who were wealthy and people who were very poor. Now this created the potential for great good.

The more wealthy members of that early church sold their land and distributed the money for the common good. Some scholars suggest that there was a famine in Jerusalem around this time and that the generosity of these new Christians literally made the difference between life and death.

Many people joined the church because they wanted to be a part of this community.

MONEY PROBLEMS IN THE EARLY CHURCH

But, in the Bible we learn that the early church also had a number of problems centering on the use and abuse of money.

Very early in the book of Acts we learn that a couple lied about how much money they had and how much money they gave to the community of faith. They loved their money more than they loved being honest to God.

The results were tragic; their deceit literally killed them. (See Acts 5:1-11)

Also, early in the book of Acts we learn that there was a bitter disagreement over the distribution of this money that was so generously given. The new Greek Jewish converts complained that their needy people were being overlooked in favor of the Aramaic speaking Jewish converts. In order to settle this dispute the disciples developed the office of deacon in order to make sure that the aid was distributed in a fair manner.

In the letters of Paul there are hints of other struggles having to do with money. For example, in his second letter to the Thessalonians Paul wrote,

“Anyone unwilling to work should not eat. For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and earn their own living.”

It seems possible that some people were taking advantage of the generosity of the early church. The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil (10), and one of those evils is depending too much on the generosity of others.

In some respects you could say that charity is not a Christian word! Christians do not believe in charity. Christians believe in sharing and mutual accountability.

MONEY IS A TOOL

We are the body of Christ, and each of us is a part of that body. Each of us has an important role to play. But, none of us are self-sufficient.

This is a delicate balance. Sometimes even with the best of intentions we do the wrong thing when it comes to our financial resources.

One of the mistakes made by the church in the mission movement was a paternalistic attitude toward other countries. We acted as if we had all the money and all the truth and in some cases did not respect the gifts and spirituality of those to whom we brought the gospel.

Fortunately today this is less of a problem. Our mission associates (not missionaries) work together with indigenous churches to promote the gospel. But, we always have more to learn when it comes sharing the gospel and our life together. And money will always play a role in that dance.

The big issue with money is learning how to use it correctly for the kingdom of God. We can't be in love with money or make it into a false god, but money can be a great tool for building up the kingdom.

Look at this way. A knife is one of the most versatile tools a person can own. It can be used in many ways. But, it can also be used to harm other people. The problem is not with the tool, the knife. The problem is with how it is used. The same is true with money.

This passage identifies two ways that money can be a spiritual problem.

The first is that sometimes we spend too much time trying to get more money. And the second is that we don't use the riches we have in the proper way. Let's talk first about our tendency to spend too much time trying to get "no money."

SHOW ME THE MONEY

Our life can be dominated by the desire to be rich.

The desire for riches is an equal opportunity vice. One of my favorite quotes is from one of the richest men who ever lived. Someone once asked John Rockefeller how much money was enough and he supposedly answered, "Just a little bit more."

Some of you may remember that famous line from the movie, Jerry McGuire, "Show me the money."

That's the cry of many in our society, and this love of money has caused pain from the wealthiest to poorest among us.

From the billion-dollar scam of a Bernie Madoff to minimum wage worker who spends all of his paycheck on the lottery, the problem is the same. The love of money is bane of our society. It still causes numerous problems.

MONEY AND CONTENTMENT

But, why are we so in love with our money?

Why does the baseball pitcher or the football player hold out for \$100 million dollars instead of a measly \$75 million dollars? Why does a paltry inheritance create rifts in families at a time of death when they should be supporting each other?

We are asking money to do something that it can't do, create contentment. Paul tells Timothy in verse six that godliness combined with contentment is the real wealth. So if money is not going to make us content, what will?

According to this passage an accurate understanding of our mortality. We come into this world with nothing, and we will leave this world with nothing. All those things that we cherish so much are just loaned to us for a while.

We know this. We even make jokes about it.

I like the one about the married man who put in his will that all his money should be placed in his coffin when he was buried. People were aghast that this man would be so selfish and create such a hardship for his wife.

But, his wife was not disturbed. She readily agreed to the request.

After the burial inquiring minds wanted to know. Did she really bury her husband with all his money? She replied, "Of course I honored his last wishes. I wrote him a check and put it in his pocket!"

Money will not do us any good in the hereafter!

We cannot cash any checks once the final bell tolls!

DAILY BREAD

But, we can trust God for the hereafter as well as the here and now. That's why we pray each week in the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread."

If we have food, clothes and shelter, that is a reason to give thanks. That is a reason to be content.

This was a radical idea in Paul's day. And it is an even more radical idea in our day and time. In an age when everyone wants just a little bit more, in an age when every form of communication is filled with commercials designed to get us to want more, Christians are called to be content with what they have.

Christians are called to say, "Enough is enough."

Christians are called to humbly ask for and give thanks for their daily bread. Each new day is a gift from God and an opportunity to serve God's kingdom.

We do not live in the past nor do we project ourselves too far into the future. We simply accept the blessings of this day and give thanks. We trust ultimately in God's creative power and not in our own ability to make a living.

RICH CHRISTIANS?

Now this does not necessarily mean that Christians will be poor? On the contrary down through history because some Christians pursued God's will instead of their own enrichment they became successful in a number of ways including the financial realm.

In this regard I think that some social scientists have made a faulty analysis of why certain Protestant groups (in particular Calvinists) and the countries in which they lived have become financially successful.

It is not; as Max Weber wrote in his famous book, "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" that they were trying to prove that they were part of God's elect by working hard.

Many Christians were successful because their needs were simple. They had a simple lifestyle that allowed them to accumulate more wealth, and they often used this surplus wealth in a benevolent way.

They believed in sharing with others as a matter of faith, and this created a better community.

IN GOD WE TRUST

The key element is faith.
What do we put our faith in?

I've commented many times that we put, "In God We Trust" on our money, and sometimes money is the "god" that we trust. But, ironically this love of money often keeps us from ever having any!

When we love money that love makes us prey to those who would tempt us with get rich schemes on the TV or the Internet. When we love money, we are (as Paul puts it) subject to ruin and destruction. We pierce ourselves with many pains.

So, money is not evil nor is money a god. Money is a tool. And the question we must ask ourselves is this:

"Will we use this tool wisely for God's kingdom or will we use it in a way that will bring pain into our lives?"

SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM

According to Paul, the key to successful living is to love God more than we love money. Paul wrote to Timothy, "But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness ..."

In other words Paul is saying what Jesus said before him. (Matthew 6:25-34) Don't worry about what you need in life. Seek God's kingdom first, and everything else will be given to you.

I have found this to be profoundly true and something that I need to think about on a daily basis. Many of us do worry about finances. And certainly we have cause to worry.

The world economy is in bad shape. We spend more than we can afford on health care. Many of us live one financial disaster away from bankruptcy.

And of course these dire possibilities are rehearsed daily on TV.

I remember a commercial that aired during the financial crisis after the dot com boom and bust. A man was watching a videotape recording of the news from the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. Reporters were beaming as they talked about the market headed for a record high. They said, "It looks like this thing will never end."

The man keeps rewinding the tape and playing the reports over and over again as the tears are streaming down his face. Memories of the good old days haunt his uncertain financial future. If only we knew that one day we look at the dot com boom and bust as the good old days!

But, guess who is in charge of this world? It is not the politicians or the pundits. It is not the characters on Wall Street. It is God.

Did you notice the language in our passage for today? Paul wrote that God is the Creator, the one who "gives life to all things" and Jesus is the Savior, the one who defeated death when he gave the good confession before Pilate.

Therefore, we trust our future to the one who is the King of kings and Lord of lords. At the right time this salvation will become apparent to the world.

But, in the meantime, if death has been defeated and the glory of God's coming kingdom is sure, we do not have to worry about the future. God has revealed the light of eternity in his Son, and that light gives us hope for the living of even the darkest day.

SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND BLESSING

So, heaven is our home and eternity is our future, but don't make the mistake of thinking that this does not have an effect on what we do today. It does. Paul wrote that rich Christians have a special responsibility in this present age.

Now let me say that compared to the rest of the world most of us are indeed rich and so Paul's words apply to most of us. We are very fortunate to have what we have and to live where we live.

So, what is the responsibility of relatively rich Christians?

First, we shouldn't let it go to our heads. We shouldn't think that God loves us best because we have more of what this world has to offer. We should be humbled and grateful for what we have, but it should not make us proud.

Second, if we have a lot of money we should be careful not to trust in money more than we trust in God. Some folks who have been on short term mission trips often comment on the fact that through the people they visit are poor in things; they are rich in soul.

Sometimes I think the converse is often true. When we are rich in things we are often spiritually impoverished.

I am reminded of the story of the rich young ruler in the Bible. He wanted to do the right thing. He wanted to follow Jesus. But, his great wealth got in the way.

Instead of giving it up to follow Jesus he went home depressed. He kept his money but he lost what was really important.

There is always the temptation for us to love our money and what our money can give us more than we love the Lord.

Third, God has entrusted us with the blessing of wealth so that we might be a blessing to others. Wealth gives us the wherewithal to do good things. Money can be a powerful tool for the kingdom of God.

Using our money this way can also be a tool for personal spiritual development. When we are generous with others it not only does good for them it also changes us in a positive way.

There are two benefits to giving. As Jesus put it when we give we give in God's name we store up treasures in heaven. None of those treasures will be subject to rust, decay or theft. (Luke 12:33)

But, this passage points out another benefit of giving generously; we create a better future for ourselves. When we are generous we become different people and lead a life that is more fulfilling.

Paul wrote that we live a "life that is really life." We have the opportunity to be a part of God's plan for the world. God allows us to (in a small way) participate in that kingdom that comes. God allows us to be a part of his will being done.

Are you living a life that is really life? Or are you bogged down by fears of what may happen in the future?

Paul suggests that we leave our fears with the Lord and invest our money and our lives with the kingdom that comes.

God give us the faith and the courage to take that bold step.
Amen.