

Living in God's Church Today

Personal Instructions

1 Timothy 6:17-21

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Personal Instructions

Scripture

In the final chapter of his First Letter to Timothy, Paul issued four charges to Timothy: first, about the false teachers (6:3-10), second, to Christian leaders (6:11-16), third, to rich Christians (6:17-19), and finally, to Timothy himself (6:20-21).

Today I want to conclude our study in Paul's First Letter to Timothy by looking at the final two charges (to rich Christians and to Timothy himself). These personal instructions are still extremely important for us in the twenty-first century.

Let us read Paul's personal instructions in 1 Timothy 6:17-21:

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. (1 Timothy 6:17-21)

Introduction

Paul left Timothy in Ephesus to deal with the problem of false teachers and their false teaching. They were leading some

church members astray and Paul wanted to strengthen Timothy's resolve to teach God's truth. The entire letter gives guidance about how "one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God" (1 Timothy 3:15).

As Paul concluded his First Letter to Timothy, he issued a series of personal instructions. We are going to look at the final two personal instructions of this letter.

Lesson

1 Timothy 6:17-21 shows us two areas that require attention.

Let's use the following outline:

1. Pay Attention to Treasure (6:17-19)
2. Pay Attention to Truth (6:20-21)

I. Pay Attention to Treasure (6:17-19)

First, pay attention to treasure.

Earlier in chapter 6, Paul addressed the issue of riches, or "treasure," as I am calling it. The false teachers were "imagining that godliness is a means of [financial] gain" (6:5). "But," Paul warned, "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" (6:9). Then Paul warned Timothy to "flee these things" (6:11).

Now, in verse 17, Paul returned to the subject of riches (or treasure). He was no longer speaking about false teachers who wanted to get rich. Instead, he was now speaking to those who were *already* rich.

I should mention that when we think of rich people we generally think of other people. We don't think of ourselves as

rich. However, in comparison to most of the rest of the world, we are rich. I once heard a definition of “poverty” that has stuck with me. “Poverty,” according to the definition I heard, “is when a person has no options.” In contrast, a lack of poverty indicates that a person has options. Almost every one of us has options. We have options regarding the food we eat and the clothes we wear and many other things. So, this text is powerfully applicable to every one of us here today.

Paul did not condemn having treasure but spoke about the danger and duty regarding treasure.

A. The Danger Regarding Treasure (6:17)

First, pay attention to the danger regarding treasure.

Paul wrote in verse 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.”** There are in fact two dangers regarding treasure.

The first danger regarding treasure is that the rich will become haughty. The Greek word for **“haughty”** (*hypsēlophroneo*) occurs only twice in the New Testament (here and in Romans 11:20), and it means “to be or become marked arrogant by superiority to and disdain of those one views as unworthy.” Those who have riches are tempted to think they are superior to others because of their riches. Rather than looking to their treasure for satisfaction, Paul wanted Timothy to instruct the wealthy to look to God who is the source of permanent and eternal joy.

The opposite of being **haughty** is being content with what one has. Visiting believers in impoverished areas shows how much joy they have even though they have very little in

the way of material possessions. Just recently, I heard a discussion on a podcast about adopting a “minimalist lifestyle.” That is getting rid of the clutter and stuff in one’s life that is not necessary. As I recall, the couple in the program were able to relocate to another part of the country while still keeping their current home. In their new home, they purchased only the essentials for daily life. After some time, they realized that they did not need all the “stuff” that they had accumulated in their other home. Moreover, they were to enjoy their new lifestyle because they did not have so many other things to distract them. They were learning to be content and not to be **haughty**.

*The second danger regarding treasure is that the rich will **set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches**.* To base one’s **hopes on the uncertainty of riches**, instead of God, is foolish. God is the only one **who richly provides us with everything to enjoy**. Proverbs 11:28 warns that “whoever trusts in his riches will fall.” And Proverbs 23:4-5 adds, “Do not toil to acquire wealth; be discerning enough to desist. When your eyes light on it, it is gone, for suddenly it sprouts wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven.” It is not wrong to have treasure. The danger is in setting one’s hopes on the uncertainty of riches.

In 1923, nine of the world’s wealthiest men held a meeting at the Edgewater Beach Hotel in Chicago. In attendance were the presidents of the world’s largest steel, gas, and utility companies, the world’s greatest wheat speculator, the president of the New York Stock Exchange, a member of the presidential cabinet, a Wall Street tycoon, the head of the world’s largest monopoly, and the president of the Bank of International Settlements.

The men who met at the Edgewater Beach Hotel that day knew all the secrets of generating and manipulating capital. They could own anything and everything that money could

buy. There was one more thing they held in common, which is that within the next decade they all lost everything they had, as Patrick Morley writes:

The president of the largest independent steel company, Charles Schwab, lived on borrowed money for the last five years of his life and died bankrupt. The president of the largest gas company, Howard Hopson, went insane. The president of the largest utility, Samuel Insull, died in a foreign land, penniless and a fugitive from justice. The greatest wheat speculator, Arthur Cotton, also died abroad and was insolvent. The president of the New York Stock Exchange, Richard Whitney, was sent to the infamous Sing Sing penitentiary. The member of the presidential cabinet, Albert Fall, was pardoned from prison so he could go home to die. The Wall Street tycoon, Jesse Livermore, committed suicide. The head of the world's largest monopoly, Ivan Krueger, committed suicide. The president of the Bank of International Settlements, Leon Fraser, committed suicide.¹

What a sad ending to men who had significant financial treasure. And yet, the Bible warns the rich not **“to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God.”**²

B. The Duty Regarding Treasure (6:18-19)

And second, pay attention to the duty regarding treasure. Paul had just urged the materially wealthy in this life not to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches but on God.

¹ Patrick Morley, *The Seven Seasons of a Man's Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 84–85.

² Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Daniel M. Doriani, and Philip Graham Ryken, *Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 277–278.

Then he wrote in verses 18-19, **“They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, 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.”** Paul wanted believers with treasure to steward their riches wisely, and to use their treasure to meet the needs of others. Paul was saying that rich Christians should not think in terms of expecting a financial return on their investment in *this* life. Instead, they will be richly rewarded in the *next* life. The expression **“truly life”** refers to the spiritual life that God gives a believer in Christ. This life has a future dimension as well as a present dimension.

I know a man who has done extremely well financially. He has shared with me how he has helped the church he attends financially. No one (except for those recording the donations) knows how much he has done for that church, not even the pastor. Sometimes, wealthy church members want the pastor to know how much they give to the church. But not this man. He doesn't want his relationship with the pastor or the other church members to be colored by his giving. It seems to me that he is taking hold of that which is truly life, and he will be rewarded in glory for his financial generosity.

So, let us pay attention to our treasure.

II. Pay Attention to Truth (6:20-21)

And second, pay attention to truth.

Just as there was a danger and a duty regarding treasure, so there is also a danger and a duty regarding truth. Paul's final charge to Timothy himself is a call for him to pay attention to truth.

A. The Duty Regarding Truth (6:20a)

First, pay attention to the duty regarding truth.

Paul wrote in verse 20a, **“O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you.”** The Greek word for **“the deposit entrusted to you”** (*parakatatheken*) occurs three times in the New Testament, all in Paul’s letters to Timothy (6:20; 2 Timothy 1:12; 1:14), and it means “property entrusted to another who then takes responsibility for it.” Paul was referring to *the truth*—the divine revelation of God that was committed to his care.

All Christians have a commitment to guard the deposit entrusted to them. They are to know the truth of God’s word and they are to defend the truth of God’s word from error and falsehood. This is especially true for shepherds of God’s flock. They must not allow false teaching to creep into their congregations. Every few years it seems that there is some fad that captures some professing Christians and draws them away from Biblical truth. I can think of the time when “The Da Vinci Code” was popular (with its teaching that Jesus got married) or the movie titled “The Lost Tomb of Jesus” (which purported that a tomb was found in Jerusalem with the names of Jesus and various family members, thereby proving that Jesus did not rise from the dead). When some of these false teachings gain traction in our community, I address them and demonstrate how their claims are false and not consistent with Biblical truth.

So, our duty regarding the truth is that the truth must be guarded.

B. The Danger Regarding Truth (6:20b-21)

And second, pay attention to the danger regarding truth.

Paul wrote in verses 20b-21a, **“Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called ‘knowledge,’ for by professing it some have swerved from the faith.”** Paul referred to false teaching as **“irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called ‘knowledge.’”** False doctrine is that which is contrary to the truth of God’s word. False teachers in Paul’s day claimed to have superior knowledge (as in Gnosticism). They claimed to have access to transcendent “truths,” but they were actually promoting error and lies. It was so effective that it caused some to **“have swerved from the faith.”** That is, they no longer professed faith alone in Christ alone by God’s grace alone.

Paul closed his First Letter to Timothy with these words, **“Grace be with you”** (6:21b). It is interesting to note that Paul addressed this letter to Timothy, as is seen in 1 Timothy 1:2a, “To Timothy, my true child in the faith.” Paul concluded his letter by writing, “Grace be with you,” where “you” is plural. Therefore, although the letter was addressed to Timothy, Paul intended that the letter be read to the entire church. It indicates that all along Paul had the congregation in mind as he wrote the letter. One other matter to note is that Paul’s conclusion is somewhat abrupt. There are no personal greetings to other people in the congregation. This suggests that Paul saw the situation as very serious that he wanted Timothy to address.

All believers require the grace of God to preserve the truth and pass it on to the next generation. God provides abundant grace to all who ask him to help preserve the truth.

So, let us also pay attention to the truth.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the personal instructions in 1

Timothy 6:17-21, let us pay attention to our treasure and to the truth.

In one of his books, writer Robert Fulgham tells the story of when his daughter was a little girl and gave him a paper bag to take with him to work. When he asked what was in the bag, she answered, "Just some stuff. Take it with you."

When he sat down for lunch at his desk the next day, he pulled out the paper bag and poured out its contents: two ribbons, three stones, a plastic dinosaur, a pencil stub, a tiny seashell, used lipstick, two chocolate Kisses, and thirteen pennies. He chuckled, finished his lunch, and swept everything off into the wastebasket.

When he arrived at home that evening, his daughter asked him where the bag was. "I left it at the office," he replied. "Why?"

"Well," she said, "those are my things in the sack, Daddy. The things I really like. I thought you might like to play with them, but now I want them back."

When she saw him hesitate, tears welled up in her eyes. "You didn't lose the bag, did you, Daddy?"

He said he didn't and that he would bring it home tomorrow. After she went to bed, he raced back to the office. Fulgham writes:

Molly had given me her treasures... all that a seven-year-old held dear. Love in a paper sack. And I missed it. Not just missed it. I had thrown it away. Nothing in there I needed. It wasn't the first or last time I felt like my "Daddy Permit" was about to run out. I went back to my office and dumped all the wastebaskets out onto my desk. The janitor came in and asked, "Did you lose something?"

"Yeah. My mind! It's probably in there."

When Fulgham found the bag, he uncrumpled it and filled it again with his daughter's items: two ribbons, three stones, a plastic dinosaur, a pencil stub, a tiny seashell, used lipstick, two chocolate Kisses, and thirteen pennies. He took the bag home, sat down with Molly, and had her tell him the story of every treasure in the bag. Then he writes:

To my surprise, Molly gave me the bag once again several days later. Same ratty bag. Same stuff inside. I felt forgiven. Over several months, the bag went with me from time to time. It was never clear to me why I did or did not get it on a certain day. I began to think of it as the "Daddy Prize," and I tried to be good the night before so I could be given it the next morning.

In time, Molly turned her attention to other things, lost interest in the game, and grew up. Me... I was left holding the bag. She gave it to me one morning and never asked for it back. It sits in my office still, left over from when a child said, "Here. This is the best I've got. Take it. It's yours." I missed it the first time, but it's my bag now.³

God has given each one of us treasure. And God has also given each one of us his truth—the word of God. Let us treat his gifts to us with the care that it deserves. And so may we be a blessing to all around us—for God's glory and the good of others. Amen.

³ See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2010/january/6010410.html>.

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is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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