

1 Timothy – The Household of God

This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare (1 Timothy 1:18 ESV)

I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, ¹⁵ if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. (1 Timothy 3:14-15 ESV)

As For The Rich

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1 Timothy 6:17-21

Rev. Levi denBok

Introduction:

Good morning! Please turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Timothy chapter 6.

This is the final sermon in our Household of God series. As we come to the final verses of this letter, I want to invite you to do some self-examination. What has changed in you as a result of what we have read in this text? We did not spend half-a-year in 1 Timothy so that we could scribble some study notes into the margins of our Bibles. We study to learn, yes, but that learning is supposed to lead to *change*. The Apostle James taught us that it is the people who *change* that receive the blessing. James 1:25 says:

But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. (James 1:25 ESV)

I heard a great analogy the other day¹. You will often hear people use the language of “wrestling with the text.” However, as common as that expression is, we don’t often talk about the *outcome* of that wrestling match. A match isn’t over until someone is pinned down for the count. My question for you as we conclude this series is: Who was pinned to the mat as you wrestled with the letter of 1 Timothy? Did *you* arise victorious? Did you find a way to bend the text to your will? Or did God’s truth win the day as you were brought into submission and conformed into a new

¹ David Helms in the podcast *Preacher’s Talk*, ep. 28 “On Argument” released September 2, 2021. Accessed June 6, 2022.

likeness? What we need is not to master the text. We need to be *mastered BY the text*. We don't simply need more study notes. We need life transformation.

So, let that be our ambition as we wrestle with this letter one last time. Look with me to 1 Timothy 6:11-16. Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today.

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 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Verses 20-21 are essentially a recap of the instructions that we studied last week in verses 10-16. Timothy is to flee from the irreverent babble of the false teachers and to guard the deposit of truth that has been passed on to him. We unpacked all of that at length last Sunday, and I'd encourage you to go back and listen if you haven't already.

Having already considered verses 20-21, we are going to lean into verses 17-19 this morning. In these verses, Paul counsels Timothy on how he is to pastor one last group in the church. He has already given him instructions on how to minister to men and women, and to widows, and to leaders, and to slaves, and to the poor. But here, Paul identifies one last group that Timothy must minister to as he looks out over the congregation – the rich.

Before we jump into these instructions, I want to make one general observation that should inform the way that we approach this passage.

General Observation

I want to be clear right from the outset that:

1. It is not a sin to be rich

A few weeks back, we read Paul’s instructions for those poor Christians in the church who longed to be rich. Those instructions include one of the most often misquoted verses in all the Bible. You have likely heard it said that “money is the root of all evil.” But is that what Paul said? Look back at verse 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. (1 Timothy 6:10 ESV)

So, the money *itself* is not the problem. The problem is our heart.

All kinds of evils spring from a heart that is in love with money. But not everyone who *has money* is a *lover of money*. Our passage this morning was written to help Timothy to pastor the rich Christians in his church which means that there is such a thing as rich Christians! And let’s notice that Timothy is nowhere instructed to shame the wealthy Christians into *getting rid* of their possessions.

On the contrary, Timothy is instructed to remind these wealthy Christians that every good gift they have is from God – the God:

who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. (1 Timothy 6:17b ESV)

Not only is it NOT a sin to be wealthy, but God invites us to enjoy the things that He has given to us. As one commentator notes:

This is an important addition. We are not to exchange materialism for asceticism. On the contrary, God is a generous Creator, who wants us to appreciate the good gifts of creation.²

I say all of this because, whenever we discuss what the Bible says about money, we are tempted to fall into a ditch on either side of the road. The materialist loves money and pursues it at all costs. He rejects all of the biblical warnings about wealth and gives himself entirely to a life of selfishness and pleasure. Obviously, that is a ditch. Don’t land there. However, there is a ditch on the other side of the road called asceticism. The ascetic fears money and flees from it. He thinks

² John Stott, *Guard the Truth – The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 161.

that the mere *possession* of wealth is wrong, and he looks down his nose at Christians with savings accounts. Both approaches are wrong.

In this passage, Paul is calling upon Timothy to teach the rich Christians in the church how to walk the narrow road that leads to life. We need to hear this because – brothers and sisters – we ARE the rich Christians!

Whenever we hear the term “rich”, our minds jump to the people who have more money than we do. We think, “I’m glad rich, old, Bobby is hearing this.” Well, I’m glad Bobby’s hearing it too, but forget about him for a moment – I’m glad that YOU are hearing this. And I’m glad that I am hearing this. If you have a roof over your head, and you know where your food is going to come from this week, then you are “rich” by all historical standards. This word is for us.

There were rich Christians like us in Timothy’s church. They needed to hear some things from their pastor. So, as we conclude this series, let’s ask one last question of the text:

What Do Rich Christians Need To Hear?

First, rich Christians need to hear that:

1. Wealth can easily lead to pride

We find this in verse 17:

As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty (1 Timothy 6:17a ESV)

Haughty is another word for proud, and it describes an attitude that is particularly prevalent amongst the rich. The more money a person accumulates, the more that person will be tempted to think highly of themselves and their achievement. It’s hard to be humble in a Lamborghini.

If Timothy wants to be a faithful pastor to the rich, then he needs to charge them not to give an inch to this prideful attitude.

Put another way, Timothy is to warn the rich Christians not to adopt the self-made-man mindset of the world. Is there any one of us who does not secretly LOVE to receive praise for our successes? Social media exists because we LOVE to invite people in to admire our achievements. “I was broke, but I worked tirelessly, invested wisely, saved prudently, and LOOK AT ME NOW! Rags to riches! I am a self-made man! Follow me on Twitter for daily inspiration!”

The logical (though unspoken) conclusion of this line of thinking is that everyone who is *not* wealthy did *not* work as hard as you did. And, of course, there’s sometimes some truth to that. The book of Proverbs teaches us that some poverty is the result of laziness. Proverbs 10:4 states:

A slack hand causes poverty,
but the hand of the diligent makes rich. (Proverbs 10:4 ESV)

So there often IS a line that can be drawn from our hard work to our success.

However, there are so many other factors that we have no control over. Like the strength in your body that you have to roll out of bed each day. Not everyone has that. Or the legs you used to walk up the steps to that interview. Not everybody has those. Or the intelligence that you maximized to get those grades. Not everybody has that. Or the people skills. Or the freedom. Or the opportunity. Or the parents. You worked hard, and that’s admirable, but recognize that there is in an infinite list of things that have contributed to your success that you had absolutely NOTHING to do with! Are you really a self-made man?

Isn’t it interesting that we are so fast to blame God for everything that went wrong in our lives, yet we are so slow to credit God for any of our successes?

Do you find yourself looking down your nose at those who have less than you? That’s a wicked mindset, and it needs to go. Do you find yourself flaunting your house, or your vehicle, or your clothing to try and impress the world? That pride will ruin your heart. Do you find yourself itching to tell the story of your impressive rise to success? This one is particularly tempting in our social-media-driven culture. Scroll through your posts from this last year – are you telling the story of how generous and worthy of praise our God is? Or are you telling the story of how awesome and

worthy of praise you are? That's poison for your soul. And its poison for the souls of all the people who follow you – including your kids!

Rich Christians need to be reminded that wealth can easily lead to pride. There should be a hazard sticker attached to your pay cheque. Thank God for wealth, but guard your heart from the pride that can easily accompany it.

That's the first thing that wealthy Christians need to hear. Second, they need to hear that:

2. Wealth has no power to save

We see this in the second half of verse 17 where Paul writes:

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.
(1 Timothy 6:17 ESV)

You pray differently when the bank account is full. If you look at your bank account and you find yourself feeling invincible, then this warning is for you. Rich Christians face a particular temptation of placing their trust in their savings rather than in their God.

When Jesus taught us how to pray, he told us to come before our Heavenly Father and to plead:

Give us this day our daily bread (Matthew 6:11 ESV)

Many – if not most – of the Christians throughout history who have prayed this prayer, prayed it with genuine urgency. They didn't have a month's supply of bread stored away. They had pressing needs for THAT day, and they brought those needs to the Lord in faith.

But rich Christians pray this prayer differently. We are in a historically unique situation. Most of us have savings. Most of us know where our meals are going to come from for the next few months. Some of you have saved up so much money that you were able to stop working all together! If you never work another day in your life, you will STILL have food to eat until you die! Praise God for that! You're enjoying a gift that most Christians couldn't have even imagined!

And this seems like an appropriate time for another reminder that it is not sinful to be wealthy or to have savings. In fact, God's Word teaches us that it is *wise* and *right* to lay up some savings to pass on to our family. We read in Proverbs 13:22:

A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children,
but the sinner's wealth is laid up for the righteous. (Proverbs 13:22 ESV)

So, savings are not wrong in and of themselves.

However, Timothy needed to remind the rich Christians in Ephesus of the very real risk associated with wealth. Rich Christians run the risk of misplacing their hope.

The poor Christian wakes up and says, "God, please provide me with my daily bread! I won't be able to get through this day without you!" The rich Christian, however, often rolls out of bed, moseys through his day, plays with his toys, climbs back into bed, and then says, "Oh, I almost forgot! Goodnight, God."

Why is that? Why is it that so many of us have had days just like that – perhaps even this week?

When you have money, it is EASY to fall into the trap of placing your hope in your money. When you have money, it is easy to convince yourself that you can handle anything that comes your way. When you have money, you can even begin to feel invincible.

And invincible people don't pray very often. Invincible people don't look forward to heaven very often. Invincible people affix their hope to temporary comforts instead of eternal glory. And that is a tremendous danger.

Because wealth can evaporate in an instant. There were wealthy Christians in Ukraine who are now living as refugees. There are wealthy Christians sitting in interview rooms hoping for a new job after an unexpected job loss. There are wealthy Christians sitting in waiting rooms waiting for their next chemo treatment. And they are presently and painfully learning that wealth cannot sustain our hope through the tragedies of life. Wealth has no power to save.

Fix your hope on God. He is the only One who is worthy of it, because He is the only One who can rescue you from the grave itself. The wealthy Christians in Timothy's church needed to hear that. So do we.

Third, wealthy Christians need to hear that:

3. To whom much is given, much is required

Look with me at verse 18:

They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, (1 Timothy 6:18 ESV)

Paul uses a play on words here to make his point. He says, "Remind those who are rich... to be rich in good works!" That's the wealth that matters! The real blessing of wealth is the opportunity that it affords to be generous! Paul has just finished saying that God is the One:

who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. (1 Timothy 6:17b ESV)

Timothy, therefore, is to remind those rich Christians where their wealth came from and then he is to charge them to use their riches to become "rich in good works."

Wealth is a gift. But wealth is also a test. God gives it to us, but then He watches what we do with it. One day, we will all answer for how we stewarded the money that He entrusted to us. Jesus said:

Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more. (Luke 12:48b ESV)

The rich need to be reminded of that.

God has blessed us with more money than we will ever need. So, if he gives us more than we need, should we use the surplus to buy a bigger house for ourselves? Or should we find a wise

way to share that abundance with those who are in need? The big house isn't sinful, but the heart motivation that led you to buy it just might be. These faith challenges are unique to the rich.

Think of it this way: God is the Father of every believer in the world. He loves every believer equally, yet He has placed each and every one of us in different circumstances. One believer was born into the lap of luxury. One was born into poverty. Both will face unique challenges.

The one who was born into luxury will be inclined towards pride and he'll be tempted to hoard his wealth. The one who was born into poverty will be inclined towards discontentment and he'll be tempted to become fixated on a love of money. Paul addresses both of those challenges in this letter.

Along with those challenges, however, come opportunities! The one who is poor will have the opportunity to learn contentment. He will have the opportunity to learn how to depend on God in ways that you and I will never understand. He will have an easier time fixing his hope on eternity, and, in fact, he will be more likely to prepare himself well to have a glorious future! Jesus said this! After the rich young ruler walked away sad, Jesus said:

“How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!”²⁴ And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God!²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” (Mark 10:23b-25 ESV)

The one who is poor today is BETTER POSITIONED to be rich forever! The first will be last and the last will be first.

“Well, then perhaps we should give away all our possessions and run for the hills!” Listen, if pride and a love of money have taken hold of your heart, then perhaps you SHOULD make some drastic changes. However, Timothy was to remind the church that their wealth provided them with an incredible opportunity. The one who is rich has the opportunity to be rich in good deeds!

The retired Christian, for example, is one of a select group of people in the *history of the world* who never has to worry about working again! There is almost no limit to the good deeds that he can do! The rich Christian can show generosity that the poor Christian could never imagine! The ability to give a gift is in and of itself a gift. You could pay to build a chapel for that congregation

in India! You could pay for that young man in the DR to go to Bible College. You could buy that widow a house! What an opportunity!

Rich Christians should take a good hard look at the needs around us, and then we should take a good hard look at the means that we've been entrusted with, and then we should take a good hard look at the amount that we've decided to keep for ourselves. Proverbs 11:24-25 says:

One gives freely, yet grows all the richer;
another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want.
²⁵ Whoever brings blessing will be enriched,
and one who waters will himself be watered. (Proverbs 11:24-25 ESV)

The one who waters will be watered.

Many of us in this room are like watering cans that have been filled to the brim. We look at the blessings that we have received, and it seems almost too good to be true! But the water in the watering can is meant to be poured out. That's why the watering can EXISTS!

If the watering can sits idle, filled to the brim with water, never sharing a drop with the world, then that watering can begins to stink. The water becomes stagnant. The very thing that was meant to be a blessing becomes a stench and a curse. Rather than bringing life, it winds up bringing death.

To whom much is given, much is required. Finally, and flowing out of what we've just discussed, wealthy Christians need to hear that:

4. Spiritual treasure is the only treasure that lasts

Look again at verses 18-19:

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. (1 Timothy 6:18-19 ESV)

As the rich Christians use their wealth to bless others, they thus store up for themselves treasure in heaven. Paul is clearly alluding to Jesus' instructions in Matthew 6 where he taught his disciples:

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19-21 ESV)

I recently heard a story about a rich woman's funeral³. She had inherited a large fortune, but little was known as to what she ever did with the money. After the funeral, a curious neighbor asked her accountant, "So, how much of that fortune did she wind up leaving behind?" The accountant turned to him and said, "Oh, she left it all behind. She took nothing with her."

We take nothing with us, friends.

When we view our lives with that eternal perspective, it changes what we might regard as a *wise* investment. A wise investment is one that will give you the greatest benefit over the long haul. The wise investment is the investment that lays up treasure for you in eternity.

So, you could buy a bigger house for yourself and enjoy it for thirty years, or you could sponsor five pastors in training in India and worship with the hundreds of men and women who are converted under their ministry for all eternity! You could buy that sports car and spend time and money meticulously maintaining it for twenty years, or you could come alongside that struggling family in your community and help them to get back on their feet. Proverbs 19:17 says:

Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord,
and he will repay him for his deed. (Proverbs 19:17 ESV)

We haven't dealt faithfully with our text this morning until we've wrestled with what Paul says at the end of verse 19. Wealthy Christians are called to be generous and to store up treasure in heaven:

so that they may take hold of that which is truly life. (1 Timothy 6:19b ESV)

³ Unfortunately, I cannot remember where I heard this story.

The biggest danger that accompanies wealth is its ability to rob us of the only treasure that ultimately matters. The rich need to be generous because, in doing so, they will TAKE HOLD of eternal life.

Does that language sound familiar? It's the same language that Paul used in his warning to Timothy in the passage that we studied last Sunday. In the same way that Timothy needed to press in and take hold of eternal life, so too do wealthy Christians. There's a reason why Jesus said that it's easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Wealthy Christians can quickly become worldly Christians. Wealthy Christians can quickly become complacent Christians. And worldly, complacent Christians are ultimately no Christians at all. To be a Christian is to take up your cross and to follow Christ. One of the ways that wealthy Christians can lean into that command is by resolving to be generous with their finances. Generosity is – in a sense – a form of spiritual warfare. When we choose to be generous, we are actively attacking the pride, and the greed, and the worldliness that often tempt the wealthy.

So, rich Christians, are you storing up treasure that will last? Or have you given your life to the pursuit of fool's gold?

Moms and Dads, I'm going to touch on a sensitive spot for a second. If you believe that you can't take your money with you, but that you CAN take your children with you, then why is it becoming so popular in our generation for parents to do "side hustles." What do we communicate to our children when mom and dad come home from work and then, as a hobby, start working again? What are we doing? If we need to work three jobs to pay for our mortgages, then let's buy smaller houses! If our pursuit of wealth or success means that we never have time to sit around the table with our children and to tell them about Jesus, then perhaps we've been duped into chasing the wrong rabbit!

I've never met a person on their deathbed who regretted the time they spent discipling their family. But I HAVE met many people – too many people – who regret sacrificing the limited time that they had with their kids in pursuit of a little more wealth and a little more success.

Wealthy Christians, God's word is calling you to TAKE HOLD OF THAT WHICH IS TRULY LIFE!

If that means letting go of your second job, then let it go!

If that means downsizing your house, then downsize your house!

If that means putting a line in your budget called "generosity" and looking for opportunities to bless the people around you, then write that line in!

God has given you a gift, and it glorifies Him when you enjoy that gift! But that gift carries with it some dangers. Wealth is good, but it can easily lead to pride. Wealth is good, but it has no power to save. Wealth is good, but to whom much is given, much is required. Wealth is good, but *spiritual* treasure is the only treasure that lasts.

So, enjoy the gift that you have received, but steward it carefully. Use the temporary treasure that you have today to store up permanent treasure for tomorrow. And, whatever you do, don't let go of that which is truly life in your pursuit of that which is here today, but gone tomorrow.

This is what wealthy Christians need to hear. This is the conclusion of Paul's letter to Timothy. And this is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Grace be with you. Let's pray.