

1 Timothy 6:17-19

We are continuing this morning with our study of Paul's first letter to Timothy, picking up at verse 17 of Chapter 6 and working through to the end. Now I say "to the end" when, in fact, we're going to fudge a little bit by concentrating only on verses 17-19 and leaving verses 20-21 alone because, in actual fact, the matters raised there are ones which we have already dealt with on more than one occasion.

And so it is that with these words Paul closes out this letter by which he has sought, over and over again, to encourage Timothy and to build up the church by addressing it on matters related to how it was ordered and how its various parts functioned and *ought* to function.

As we have worked our way through we have seen these purposes demonstrated in a number of ways:

-through direct words of encouragement to Timothy
-through warnings *about* false teachers
-through Paul's giving concrete ways to *identify* false teachers *and* false teaching
-through teaching about how men and women ought to *be* and how they ought to *relate* to one another in the community of faith
-through the provision of some clear guidelines for identifying and setting apart elders and deacons and
-through addressing issues relevant to specific sub-groups within the Ephesian congregation, such as widows, slaves, etc.

The comments here in chapter 6 are more of that same sort of thing - Paul's addressing, through Timothy, some particular persons *within* the wider congregation. In this case he is targeting the *wealthy Ephesians* on issues especially relevant to them - and all for the over-riding purpose of promoting the life and health of the congregation.

Now, if you have been with us throughout this series you will know that this is not the first time that Paul has said something on this topic of riches or wealth. In chapter 2:9-10, he addressed women on the issue of their personal *adornment*, saying that they should be known more for how they *lived* than how well they *dressed*.

In chapter 3, amidst the qualifications for elders and deacons, we saw that those who lead in God's church are not to be "lovers of money" (3:3) and not pursuers of "dishonest gain" (3:8) - which, as we have seen, was a direct contrast to the behavior and perspective of some of the false teachers.

In chapter 5, Paul talks about the responsibility of God's people to provide for their own relatives which, of course, is a complex issue but which also surely involves the issue of money, and the costliness of providing such care for our family members, and our reluctance sometimes to make the sorts of sacrifices that are necessary in order to do these kinds of things.

Later on in chapter 5 Paul talked about the importance of honoring elders who were given to teaching and, by implication then, the church's responsibility to support them in that role - which, again, is something that involves attitudes and perspectives on money and the relative value of that to things like the ministry of the Word in the local congregation.

Then, at the beginning of chapter 6, we heard Paul's warnings, again, about the false teachers and especially of how some of them were promoting a form of "godliness" that saw Christianity as a way to get wealthy. And, of course, in teaching these things the false teachers were simply playing on the discontentment and widespread desire of so many people to acquire wealth.

This desire to get rich is what Paul addresses in verses 6-10 of this chapter - warning those who loved money of the danger and destruction that awaited them for such idolatry. Now, at the end of chapter 6, Paul is addressing a different sub-group. Whereas verses 6-10 were aimed at what you might call "the Christian poor" - those who are not wealthy *but would like to be*, verses 17-19 are targeting the "Christian rich" - those who *are* rich and *do have* wealth.

Paul's program, presented here, for those who are well off in the Ephesian church was something that, if practiced, would reveal whether or not they were the "lovers of money" that he warned about earlier. Further, Paul's instructions - if heeded - would go a long way toward protecting the wealthier believers from the sorts of ruinous temptations that people of means need to constantly guard their hearts against. That's what we have in the text before us this morning. Before we look at that, let's pray together.

(Pray and read text)

Now, there will be 2 main *movements* in our study of this text. Firstly, we are going to look at 2 dangers that often go along with possessing earthly wealth. Then we are going to look at 2 responses that can be made to these dangers and which will help God's people to maintain a good and right perspective on wealth.

For starters, I want you to see 2 dangers that often accompany the possession of wealth. Firstly, Paul deals with the danger of *arrogance* or *pride*. "Command those who are rich in this present world," says Paul, "not to be arrogant...."

Now, of course, arrogance comes in lots of different shapes and sizes and can be attributed to a variety of sources. But the arrogance spoken of *here* is the arrogance of the rich, i.e., the arrogance that is often bred and nurtured by the circumstance of having wealth. How does that happen? Well, it can happen in a number of ways.

One way springs from the obvious fact that having money often means having the ability to do things and to get things done with greater speed and ease than most.

Living in that sort of circumstance and functioning in that way can, over time, affect the way a person begins to see and/or feel about himself or herself. That is, the wealthy person might say to herself, "I am a person who gets things done and makes things happen." - which, of course, may be perfectly true and is not a wrong conclusion to make.

But then something happens. The true perception that "I am a person that gets things done" begins to spill over into the world of fantasy and illusion. In other words, arrogance begins to creep into the picture as the person says to herself, "Because I use my wealth to make things happen and get things done, I am, *therefore*, a *powerful person*. I am an *important* person." Now, whether a person *actually* says these things to themselves is immaterial. The point is that when a person begins to *think* this way about herself, she's in trouble.

Because at that point pride, which is essentially competitive, really kicks in and says, "I am not only an important person but a *very* important person, and certainly more important than _____." And then the feedback loop gets going and a person begins to spiral away into even greater heights - or perhaps we should say - *depths* of arrogance and conceit. That is one way that wealth can breed arrogance.

Another kind of arrogance that can accompany wealth - and which is perhaps simpler - is not the mistaken belief that the possession of wealth makes you a powerful and more significant person but the belief that *your wealth is your security*. It is the false confidence and erroneous belief that money gives you some extra layer of protection against life's uncertainties and that it offers you some sort of guarantee or magic charm that will protect you from being ravaged by the unexpected.

This is the second danger that having wealth brings - the danger of a false security - and it is, of course, utter *foolishness*. Because, as Paul points out, wealth *can't* be a hedge against uncertainty because wealth itself IS one of life's uncertainties. You can have it, but then it can all be gone in an instant. How many stories have you and I heard about this in our lifetimes? You can lose everything in a fraction of the time it took you to accumulate it - literally in the blink of an eye.

As a result, counting on wealth to protect you from life's uncertainty is like depending on a concrete life preserver to protect you from the possibility of a sinking ship. It's foolish. And that's the challenge of wealth: *to have it but not hope in it*. To use it, but not count on it. In short, the challenge is to not let money become a replacement for God - to not let your wealth become:

...a functional Savior that you depend on for your redemption/protection and/or deliverance or

...a functional Lord whom you love and serve and obey or

...a functional Father from whom you draw your identity

...a functional Holy Spirit to whom you run for comfort and

And many, many other variations on that theme. But that's the challenge and danger of wealth: *to have it, but not hope in it* and to not let it become a replacement for God.

Well, let's turn now from looking at some dangers that accompany the possession of wealth to looking at 2 responses that we can see within Paul's words here, and which can be a great help to God's people in these circumstances. Listen to Paul's words again: (Read vs 17-19 again)

Paul talks in these verses about 2 things, at least. He talks about what the wealthy believers in Ephesus are to DO and he talks about how they are to BE. Both of these are important and we will look at them in turn - firstly we will look at what Paul wants them to DO.

Paul says he wants those who have abundant material resources to *do good* and to measure their wealth, not by how much they possess but by what sort of track record they have in doing "good deeds". Now, we reformed types, who are all about grace, can sometimes get very nervous when we start hearing people talk about good deeds or good works, etc. And typically, this is because we are terrified that someone might think we are suggesting some sort of connection between our good works and our standing with God. So let me tell you: that sort of thing isn't being suggested.

At the same time, and keeping all of that in mind, you still must take seriously the language that Paul uses here when he talks about good deeds. Paul says that those who are "rich in good deeds" are *laying up a foundation* for the coming age, SO THAT they may take hold of the life that is truly life - that is eternal life, life in Christ.

Those are strong words. But if Paul is not suggesting that good deeds result in or bring about a person's salvation - which he certainly is not - then what IS he saying? Simply this: Paul is talking about the necessity of good works - not for salvation - but as *evidence* of salvation. He is saying that those who are rich in good deeds are *showing themselves to be* the truly saved people that they *actually are*.

Now, we'll have more to say about that in a moment, but for now simply note that Paul's command for those who are wealthy to be "rich in good deeds" is a strong one. And, far from being a kind of optional, take-it-or-leave-it kind of thing, it was absolutely crucial that those of God's people who were materially well-off should take these things to heart and put them into practice.

And, of course, the mandate that Paul is giving here is not *only* for those who are wealthy. The commitment to "doing good" was to be an identifying character trait of all of God's people. Listen to these words from Paul's letter to Titus,

(Read 2:11-3:2 and 3:8)

Again you see here the connection that Paul is making. Not a salvific connection. The good works spoken of here are not *determinants* of a person's salvation, but they are very much *indicators* of it. And so, while Paul is focusing on the wealthier believers in 1 Timothy 6:17-19, it is not because this expectation is *exclusive* to them, but simply because as those who had greater privileges and material means, then the devotion to doing good was to be an *especially* obvious part of their lives.

And these things are certainly just as true for wealthy believers - and as Titus shows - for ALL believers in our own day. The same principle remains - God's people are to be known as His people by the "wealth" of good deeds that emanate from them. Those who have greater wealth have, as a result, a greater *responsibility* for such things - which means that there is also the greater privilege of doing them. And if indeed you *are* among the wealthy do not miss what God's Word is to you - the purpose of your wealth, the *primary use* to which you are to put your wealth is not to make it a kind of false security, not to build bigger and bigger stockpiles as some kind of imaginary hedge against the uncertainties of the future. No, the reason you have been entrusted with it is so that you can "do good" with it.

So, the one response is to DO good, but there's more to it than that. Paul says, in verse 18, "Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to *be generous* and *willing to share*..." And the key phrase in all of that is "willing to share".

In other words, it is not *bare* doing that Paul has in view - as if a kind of clinical, detached, begrudging sort of philanthropy would be an acceptable form for this to take. No, what Paul has in view is a kind of doing of good that flows from a heart that is *willing to share* - that wants to, that desires to, that is eager to do so.

What we see here is the same sort of thing that lies behind such passages as 2 Corinthians 9:6-8 where we find the familiar verse, "...God loves a *cheerful* giver..." Why does God love a *cheerful* giver? Because generosity can be faked. Because giving and doing good things can be entirely self-motivated and self-centered. Because it can be a form of manipulation - a calculated act which has the promotion or advancement of self as its goal and which can come from a heart that is not at all concerned to love and honor God.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul is saying that giving ought to be a *delight* - *the product of a heart that is over-joyed with God*. In the same sort of way, Paul is saying in 1 Timothy that the doing of good deeds ought to be a delight, it ought to come from a heart that is *willing to share* - glad to share, delighted to share its abundance with others. Paul wants a doing that is not merely functional. He wants a doing that is born of *being*.

But then the question becomes: How do we get there from here? What is it that will make this sort of glad, willing generosity happen? What is it that will make this kind of doing of good possible? The key is returning to something we have already seen: becoming people that do not put their hope in wealth but in God. Now that sort of thing may sound *simple* but it lives *hard*, doesn't it?

Because one reason we struggle with being generous, the reason we struggle to let go of things, the reason that we DO so easily place our hope in wealth is because we don't trust God. We don't trust him with our present, and we certainly don't trust Him with our future. We don't actually believe that God can be trusted with our hopes. So we entrust them to something else. We doubt the security or worth of a heavenly treasure that we cannot see and so we settle for a lesser, earthly one that we *can* see. We don't believe that the promised banquet will ever happen, so we settle for the moldy bread and table scraps we can dig out of the nearest garbage can, convincing ourselves as we do that *this is really good stuff*. But it's not.

But until we recognize our fundamental unwillingness to trust God, until we repent of our unbelief, and confess our faithlessness, we will not have the desire or ability to trust God - and to keep trusting God for the long haul. We will not be people who gladly give, who are willingly generous, who freely let go of our possessions. We may do it in spurts, motivated by guilt, or shame, or a competitive, prideful spirit - or for some other ignoble reason. But until we transfer our hope from the imposter that is wealth, and onto the only, genuine ground for hope - God - then the sort of sustained generosity and liberality that Paul is describing here will simply not be possible.

Now, you might fairly ask, "Is it only about the future? Is that all we have - is there nothing in the present for us - no down-payment, no foretaste? Is it only the hope in God *in front of us* and what that hope will translate into in terms of some *future* reality?"

No! For as Paul says here, this God in whom we are to place our hope, this God who preserves the treasure that has been, and is being "laid up" for those who are "rich" in good deeds, this same God is one who Paul says "richly provides" his people - "with everything for our enjoyment" - present tense, right now.

Now what kinds of things is Paul talking about here? Well, if you try and understand this within the immediate context of this letter, you are drawn to 1 Timothy 4:1-5 (read this). Do you remember those verses?

The language here in chapter 4 - about how everything God created is good - that language there is very similar to that in chapter 6 when it talks about the God who "richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment." If you remember from our study of chapter 4, some of the false teachers were promoting the crazy notion that marriage was wrong - even evil - and along with that were getting people all worked up about the dangers of eating this thing and that thing. In short, they were taking two very *basic* things - food and marriage - simple things which are good and meant for our use and enjoyment - and making them distasteful and a thing to be avoided.

And it is these sorts of things - simple things, basic things that God has created and given to us - these are the sorts of things that we have been richly blessed with and which are there for our enjoyment - people, relationships, marriage - and all that goes

with that - like the beauty of sexual love, the simple pleasures of food and drink, the beauty of creation, children, laughter, *time* – All of these are part of the simple, basic things that God has richly provided us with, and which we, in our madness and hysteria, continually rush right past.

These are the things which fill the litanies of regret that spill forth from people on their death bed - the things over which they grieve because when they *had* them, they did not see them, or enjoy them. And now that they *DO* see them, they can neither *have* them or enjoy them.

These things are right there. Right there in front of you, *right now*. Do you understand that this is what Paul is saying? He's not saying that God *might* do these things, or that God *occasionally* does these things, or that God *once* did these things. Paul talks to Timothy about God doing these things *now*. He wants the Ephesians to see the present provision of God, who gives them everything for their enjoyment.

And that same God has provided for you no less than he provided for them. God *IS* doing this, and has been doing this for his people all along. Right now. Friends, the problem is not that we do not have enough, it's that we don't realize what we already have. The problem is not the wealth that we do not have, it's the wealth we *DO* have, *but which we do not see*, and for which we are so seldom thankful.

Put your hope in God. Let him lift the veil from your eyes to see how fabulously wealthy you already are. And may that loosen your grip on the things of this world, and firm your confidence in the God who *does* provide you now with all things for your enjoyment and who has secured for you an eternal reward - centered on the treasure that is God Himself.