

***Living for Christ in a Confused and Confusing World***

**A Study of Paul's Letters to Timothy**

**Sermon # 11**

**The Place of Prosperity in a Life of Faith**

**1 Timothy 6:3-21**

As we have seen the letter to Timothy addressed six main topics, the first two verses of chapter six complete the fifth topic dealing with the Church's social responsibilities in which Timothy is given instructions about three groups in the church, widows, elders and slaves (5:3-6:2). Now Paul deals with the last topic the Church's attitude towards Possessions (6:3-21).

The Bible abounds with warnings and exhortations about the dangers of confusing material prosperity with the blessings of God.

Paul wrote in (Phil 4:11-13) "Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: (12) I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. (13) I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Solomon the wisest man who ever lived wrote of the danger of greed in Eccles 5:10, "He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; Nor he who loves abundance, with increase."

Yet in spite of the biblical warning the church has been discredited down through the years many times because of greed. In the Middle Ages it was the disgraceful sale of indulgences; a few years ago it was exposure of television evangelists extravagant lifestyles; today it can be cults who charge exorbitant rates for tuition to attain a higher level of spirituality or prosperity preachers who promise personal prosperity to those who will send in "seed money."

The Danger of Perverting the Truth About Prosperity. (A Warning to the False Teachers) (vv. 3-5)

"If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, (4) he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, (5) useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.

The first mark of a false teacher is that they deviate from the truth. (v. 3) “If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness.” There will be those who come advocating a different doctrine (*heteros* – different, *disaskaleo* – teaching). In order to be able to identify error we don’t need to study the teaching of every cult we need to be well grounded in the truth. Just as in the detection of counterfeit money, the best method to identify the counterfeit teaching, is to become familiar with the real deal. Two essential marks of sound teaching are that they come from Christ and they promote godliness!

The second mark of a false teacher is that they divide the church (vv. 4-5a).

“He is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, (5) useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth...” The false teacher is characterized as “proud and knowing nothing” or as the New English Bible puts it he is a “*pompous ignoramus*.” The false teacher has an interest in controversies and quarrels about words.

The third mark of a false teacher is that in the final analysis they love money. (v. 6b) “... who suppose that godliness is a means of gain.”

The Danger of Worshipping Prosperity.

(A Warning to the Poor) (vv. 6-10)

“Now godliness with contentment is great gain. (7) For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. (8) And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. (9) But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. (10) For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”

What these verses teach us is that greed is a trap, for the rich and for the poor and for everyone in between.

“A survey of 2,000 people in the U.S. labor force was conducted to determine how their faith influences their spending. It found, faith makes little difference to the ways in which people actually conduct their financial affairs.” 1[1]

We buy more than we can afford because we want more than we need. Some-one has said that credit cards let you start at the bottom and dig yourself a hole. “*How many of you*

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1[1] [Adult Teaching Guide (March –May 1994) 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon. (Atlanta: Sunday School Growth Curriculum, SP Publications, 1994) pp. 74-75]

*received at least one credit card offer this past week?"* The average American receives 32 credit card offers per year, regardless of their credit history.

Nationally, the average American has four major credit cards with an average credit card debt of \$9000.00. When you realize that a number of these individuals have been convinced to pay a minimum payment plan, you have a recipe for disaster. A credit card with a balance of \$3900.00 making a 3% payment would require nearly 42 years to pay off the debt and the total of those monthly payments would total \$14,530.00.

Paul says godliness is 'gain' even 'great gain' providing you mean spiritual gain and not financial.

The love of money is identified as "a root of all kinds of evil," not the root of all evil. What are the danger signs of loving money? John MacArthur in his commentary identifies five danger signs of loving money.

(1) Those who love money are more concerned with making it than being honest. (2) Those who love money never have enough of it. (3) Those who love money tend to flaunt it. (4) Those who love money resent giving any away. (5) Those who love money often sin to get it. 2[2]

Paul reminds Timothy that some people who have become so caught up in their desire for wealth that they have "strayed from the faith," with painful results. The phrase "pierced themselves" literally means to be skewered from every direction and roasted like a piece of meat.

The Danger of Identifying With Prosperity

(A Warning to the Man of God) (vv. 11-16)

"But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. (?12)? Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses."

In (vv. 11-12) we find four successive commands directed to the child of God; Flee, Follow, Fight and Fasten onto. 3[3]

"Flee" - "But you, O man of God, flee these things ..." What are 'these things' that he is told to flee? He is to flee from the things that characterize the lives of the false teachers. He is

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2[2] [John MacArthur. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary – 1 Timothy. (Chicago; Moody Press, 1995) pp. 249-250]

3[3] R. Kent Hughes & Bryan Chapell. Preaching the Word - 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus. (Wheaton Illinois: Crossway Books, 2000). pp. 152-155]

to flee any teaching that robs Christ of his glory (v.3). He is to flee from those who are obsessed with fruitless argumentation. He is to flee those who imagine that *“godliness is a means to financial gain”* (v. 5).

“Follow” – “... and pursue righteous-ness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentle-ness. (v. 11) The Christian life is not just one of flight it is also one pursuit of spiritual virtues. There are here three pairs given here; righteousness-godliness, faith–love, patience–gentleness.

“Fight” – “Fight the good fight of faith, (v. 12a). Earlier in 1:18 Paul had said *“wage a good warfare or fight the good fight”* where the image was of a soldier but here when he uses (*agonizomai*) it is suggestive of an athletic contest.

“Fasten onto” – “... lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. (v. 12b)

As a believer Timothy already has eternal life, what he is instructed to do is, to grab it for all it worth, to live it to its fullest.

Paul strengthens his appeal to Timothy, with strong arguments of the presence of God and the Second Coming of Christ. In verse thirteen he writes, “I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, (14) that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing, (15) which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, (16) who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen.”

Paul's call upon the Father and the Son as witnesses is not meant to intimidate Timothy but rather to encourage him. For in these verses we are given four truths about God's nature and power. 4[4]

First, God is Invincible. “... He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords.” (v. 15b). Beyond all earthly power is Jesus who alone has the right to the title – *“King of kings and Lord of lords.”*

Second, God is Immortal. “who alone has immortality...” (v. 16a) which is to say who alone is immortal by nature. It is true that as human being we are immortal in the sense that we survive death, but God alone has life within himself.

Third, God is Inaccessible. “... dwelling in unapproachable light.” (v16b)

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4[4] John Stott. Guard the Truth. The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus. (Downer's Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996) p. 159]

Fourth, God is Invisible. "... whom no man has seen or can see..." (v. 16c) Being by nature invisible, man can only come to know him so far as it pleases him to make himself known. No one has ever really seen Him, they have only been allowed to see his "glory." (Exodus 24:9, Isaiah 6:1, Ezekiel 1:28).

The Danger of Trusting Prosperity. (A Warning to the Rich) (vv. 17-19)

"Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. (18) Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, (19) storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."

Paul identifies two very real dangers to which the wealthy are exposed. First there is the danger of pride (v. 17a) "Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty." Riches have the propensity to make the possessor look down on those less fortunate than themselves.

The second danger is false security (v. 17) "Command those who are rich in this present age not to ... trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy."

Final Words to Timothy (vv. 20-21) "O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge—(21) by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith."