

A Study on 1 Timothy

Week 11 | 6:3-10

Overview | The danger of false teaching

The final section of 1 Timothy (6:3-21) returns to the theme of the beginning of the letter.

- Responding to False Teaching (1:1-20)
- Restoring the Church (2:1-3:13)
- Reminding Timothy (3:14-4:16)
- Restoring the Church (5:1-6:2)
- Responding to False Teaching (6:3-21)

In the first half of this final section Paul focuses on the dangers of false teaching and the natural results and consequences that stem from it. The structure of this section is simple:

- The source of false teaching (6:3-5)
- The source of contentment (6:6-8)
- The source of discontentment (6:9-10)

As Paul finishes out this letter he exposes one of the main issues with the false teachers. Certainly the teaching is a problem but it goes deeper – it is a matter of the heart. The contrast in this letter has been between godliness and sinful behavior, between true doctrine and false doctrine, and now in this last section Paul contrasts a heart of contentment in Christ versus a heart of discontentment and conceit.

The source of false teaching | 6:3-5

As Paul has often done in this letter he structures this argument with a chiastic structure.

- False teaching – teaching a different doctrine (6:3)
 - The reality – he is puffed up and understands nothing (6:4a)
 - The result – ungodly behavior (6:4b, 5a)
 - The reality – he is depraved in mind and deprived of truth (6:5b)
- False teaching – believing that godliness is a means of material gain (6:5c)

Verse 3 – Paul uses a play on words to contrast truth and error. In verse 3 the word “sound” can also be translated as “healthy” which is in direct contrast to the unhealthy craving for controversy (v. 4) that comes from false doctrine. The idea is that the teaching that leads to godliness is that which has come directly from Jesus. Truth is what leads to spiritual health which translates into godly (healthy) behavior. Those who deviate from the truth teach a different doctrine that is detrimental to one’s spiritual health and in the end is opposed to godliness even though it may appear to be good.

Verse 4a – The root of the error is not just in bad information or teaching but it is in the character of the false teacher. Paul says the false teacher who has departed from truth is “puffed up with conceit and understands nothing.” Denny Burk in his commentary says, “The conceited person is deceived in his views because he is deceived about himself; he regards himself and his own opinions more highly than he ought. In the Greek, all of the character deficiencies that follow result from the fact that the false teacher is conceited (Duguid, Hamilton Jr., Sklar, p. 445).” Out of this false view of self and puffed up sense of importance the false teacher actually ends up understanding nothing. It’s the great irony – the false teacher who claims to know the truth is actually the one needs to understand the truth. “All who quarrel with apostolic teaching and reject its authorship must realize that they are opposing the Lord of the church who is its true Author, and are thus setting aside the doctrine that accords with and

promotes true godliness...Faithful Christian teaching always has the aim of inculcating the reverent awe of God that is gained under his blessing (Cook, p. 102)."

Verses 4b, 5a – The result from this heart attitude is a lifestyle of ungodly behavior.

- Unhealthy craving – Means ill or infected mind, leading away from the health of the gospel
- Controversy and quarrels about words – The unhealthy craving leads to fighting over words or fighting using words. It's possible this phrase is used to demonstrate the quarrels about words were in direct contrast to the one true Word. The false teachers were caught up in foolish arguments that in the end proved their ignorance.
- Envy, dissension, slander... - This is a progression of ungodly behavior that leads to division and moral degradation.

Verse 5b – Paul uses strong language to describe the moral and intellectual capacity of the false teacher. To call him "depraved in mind and deprived of the truth" speaks to one who is corrupt in thinking and not only distorts the truth but teaches an altogether different gospel (a non-gospel).

Verse 5c – One of the proofs of this false teaching and different gospel is the belief that godliness is a means for gain (prosperity). This would have been acceptable within the cult practices of the temple worship in Ephesus but Paul rebukes the false teachers for bringing that mentality into the church. (It's not wrong for the elder to be paid but it is wrong for the motive for serving to be gain.)

The source of contentment | 6:6-8

In contrast to the false teachers who seek prosperity and worldly gain, Paul highlights that true gain is not found in pursuit of wealth but in godly contentment in the Giver of all things. He states an obvious fact but one that we often have a hard time remembering – we brought nothing into the world and we can't take anything with us when we die. Godly contentment is rooted in that which has eternal significance and substance which allows us to then be content in this world in plenty and in want.

"Paul has learned to be content not because he has an inner, Stoic, superhuman strength or because circumstances have been good to him. Paul's contentment is rooted in a faith that denies his own ability to perform his tasks and asserts the need for total reliance on the all-powerful God. The contentment that is of great profit is one that seeks its security not in worldly riches but in God (Mounce, p. 340)."

The source of discontentment | 6:9-10

Those that seek riches will not find true contentment. Paul describes a progression of discontentment that ultimately leads to one's spiritual destruction.

- Temptation – The lure of riches and the false promises associated with wealth has a unique ability to draw us away from contentment in Christ.
- Snare – As one is drawn away from Christ there is the danger of becoming trapped and ensnared by the very thing one desires. The other two times this word is used in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim. 3:7; 2 Tim. 2:26) it is attributed to Satan laying the trap. It's as if Paul is warning the church that Satan uniquely uses riches as a means of drawing us away from Christ.
- Senseless and harmful desires – Once ensnared by a desire for wealth our hearts can become ruled by desires that ultimately harm us.
- Plunge people into ruin and destruction – The term used for plunge is used elsewhere for describing the sinking of ships. This is similar to when Paul said there were those that "shipwrecked" their faith. Ruin and destruction describe not just a life of poor choices but rather the eternal judgment and total destruction that awaits those who have abandoned the faith.

Paul reiterates this in verse 10. Money itself is not bad. Having money is not bad. The heart issues surrounding money are the problem. It is the love of money that is a root of all kinds of evil. Think about what is associated with the love of money. What types of things are born from a love and desire for money?

Paul concludes this section with the dire warning of what can happen, and what has already happened, to those that love and pursue money as the end goal. He describes them as those who have “wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs (6:10).”

Mounce comments, “The word group describes an intense, deeply felt pain. Because the opponents had fallen in love with money, they had, as it were, stabbed themselves with the sword of greed and bore the intense pain and grief of self-inflicted wounds. It can refer to the pangs of guilt, conscience, remorse, and the actual pains incurred by the sin itself (Mounce, p. 348).”

So What? |

Resource List

Teaching 1 Timothy by Angus Macleay (Primary Source for class)

1 Timothy by Philip Graham Ryken

Let's Study 1 Timothy by W. John Cook

Word Biblical Commentary: Pastoral Epistles by William D. Mounce

1-2 Timothy & Titus by Philip H. Towner

ESV Expository Commentary: Ephesians-Philemon edited by Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., Jay Sklar

Commentary on 1 Timothy by John Calvin

ESV Study Bible