

THE WEALTHY AND THE WORLDLY

1 Timothy 6:6-10 and 17-19

What God Can Do and Money Cannot

By

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Opening.

*Only after the last tree has been cut down,
Only after the last river has been poisoned,
Only after the last fish has been caught,
Only when the air is unsafe to breathe,
Only then will you find **money cannot be eaten....***

— Cree Prophecy

Paul in 1 Timothy 6:5 speaks of “**men of corrupt mind who have been robbed of the Truth and who think godliness [eusebeia] is a means to financial gain.**” Then in v. 6 he says, “**but godliness with contentment is great gain.**” Let’s reach for some clarity here. *Eusebeia* is a word I struggled with for years, simply because “**godliness**” had such a rigid, legalistic, man-centred ring to it. What does “**godliness**” look like in a culture of mass materialism? What is “**godliness**,” anybody have an idea? Usually defined as ‘what-not,’ what *not* to do. It’s not drinking, not dancing, not smoking, not chewing gum, not going to the movies, not smiling, not wearing clothes from the current decade, cutting your hair for men, not cutting your hair for women, not laughing {or at least not in public, Heaven forbid you should have a good time!}, speaking in lofty language and piously religious clichés {at least until you get home and put a verbal beat down on your spouse and children!}, eating certain foods and not eating others. *This... this is why the term brought such aversion up in me.* And I’m certain I’m not alone.

But you know what it really means? It’s actually a profoundly beautiful image in Hellenistic Greek often used in the emperor-worship of the Roman Empire. It speaks of ‘*reverence* toward the gods,’ and the ‘*acts of honor*’ which come from a reverent heart {don’t miss this connection!}. **It means loyalty— a worshipful fear which leads to loyalty.** *Eusebeia* means to be *reverent* and *respectful*, *loyal* to our Lord, to live with a heart of *worship* toward God— to worship Him with everything we are, in everything we do, in everywhere we go with everyone we’re with. That all-encompassing enough?

Essay— The Wealthy and the Worldly.

Paul’s counter to these pseudo-teachers pseudo-belief that worshipping God is “**a means to financial gain**” is this. “**But godliness with contentment, but worship with contentment, but loyalty to the Lord with contentment, is great gain,**” v. 6. *Autarkeia*, “**contentment**,” is the overriding ideal of Stoic philosophy: ‘that one could be and should be satisfied with little.’ “**Contentment**” for those who walk with God is an ‘inner peace, an inner strength, an inner sufficiency despite our outer conditions.’ This inner sufficiency is our trust in the Holy Spirit. When the Greek philosopher Epicurus was asked the secret to happiness he said, “Add not to a man’s possessions... but take away from his desires.” Actually *joy*, which is

infinitely better than happiness, is found in what Jesus teaches us, “Add not to a man’s possessions or power, prestige or popularity, but set the compass of his soul on a single heading— *on Me!*”

Remember the story in Luke 10 when Mary “**sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what He said**” {v. 39}, soaking in the words of wisdom which fell from Jesus’ lips, and Martha comes crashing in to reprimand the Lord of Glory? Jesus say’s, “**Martha ...you are worried and upset about so many things,**” you’re running around the kitchen like a crazed animal, “**but only one thing is needed.**” Only *one* thing could be considered ‘critical to your survival;’ only one thing is *absolutely* necessary— and that’s whether or not you follow Me. Are you willing to love Me and lay aside your dinner plans? “**Mary has chosen**” this, “**and it will not be taken away from her,**” vv. 41-42. Do you see what Jesus is saying; do you hear His Spirit speaking? This is the one thing and the only thing: that we lay ourselves at the Master’s feet, we soak in His Word like the River of Life, we let it wash our hearts clean and purify us from the inside out, then we stand and by our *lives*, not just our lips, we *worship* Him with all we are! We love Him with our lifestyles ...by doing what He said. By *obeying* His commands.

Taking Nothing In, Taking Nothing Out.

What a profound statement of simplicity and reality v. 7 is. “**For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.**” There’s a grim Spanish proverb which says, ‘There are no pockets in a funeral shroud.’ Which is another way of saying *precisely* what the U.S. government tells you by the inheritance tax: “Listen, you can’t take it with you... so you might as well give it to us!” “**But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.**” But we’ll be *satisfied* if we have basic nourishment for our bodies, and covering for ourselves: clothes for our backs and a roof over our heads.

Now listen to Paul’s instruction for a consumerist culture, a materialist mindset. He’s writing to Timothy, who’s in *Ephesus*, which was *the* greatest city in the Roman province of Asia. The Ephesians took for their city the title *The First and Greatest Metropolis*; one Roman writer called it *Lumen Asiae*, the ‘Light of Asia.’ Because of its unique position where all the western roads of Asia found their ending, and because of its incredible harbor, it was the centre of trade and luxury. The ancient geographer Strabo called it “the Market-Place of Asia Minor.” For fashion, for wealth, for luxury and opulence, it was the New York fashion district, the hipness of Hollywood, Rodeo Drive, and the South Beach of Miami rolled into one on the eastern Med. That’s the kind of crowd Paul is speaking to and Timothy is shepherding.

The Followers of Jesus in Ephesus were not just slaves and laborers, some of them were very, very wealthy, “**rich in this present world.**” And the rest of the Community lived and worked and walked and observed this kind of luxuriance, this *mass* materialism and the *effect* it had on the souls of human beings. They saw, firsthand, the corruption which creeps into the hearts of men and women who make riches and wealth, “**money**” and things, the endgame of life. I.e., who look to these as the

standards by which they evaluate their life, their happiness, their relationships, their God.

“People who want to get rich,” Paul tells us using a present participle— ‘the ones desiring, longing, willing themselves to wealth {*boulomai* means ‘will *deliberately*, have as an ultimate *purpose*’}, those with the will to be rich at any cost, those desiring an abundance of outward possessions— **“fall into temptation and a trap** [a ‘snare’ used to entangle birds and beast, to catch and kill them unexpectedly] **and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.”** He’s talking about the danger awaiting those of us, *yes...* us, who desire wealth at *any* cost and by *any* means. Regardless of what it does to my relationship with Faith and Family. Riches are a **“trap,”** Paul’s saying, they lead to bondage, not to freedom!

The Lust For Money.

I love this in v. 10. With no hesitation whatsoever, no fear of his audience’s expectations, he says, **“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.”** Paul actually took this from the Greek philosophers of the Classical Age. *Demokritus* {called the ‘father of modern science,’ 5th century BC} said, “Love of money is the metropolis of all evils;” the poet *Phokylides* {6th century BC} famous for his contempt of the vanities of wealth and rank, power and position said, “The love of money is the mother of all evils.” I.e., all other evils spring forth from the womb of this harlot. The literal translation would be, “For a root of all the evils is the love of money” {Hendriksen}. It’s not **“money”** itself which is **“evil”** but the **“love of money,”** the *craving* for it, the *lust* over it— the Wall St. and Washington ethos of “I’ll eagerly eviscerate my nation’s economy, put people out of work and families out of homes, for my own personal enrichment. The **‘wrath of the Lamb’** be damned {Rev. 6:16}!” It’s a raw hunger for money and what we think it can buy.

Let’s get right down to the pertinent and the personal. I’ll tell you what it can’t buy. It can’t buy you entrance to the Kingdom of Heaven. “Money can’t buy you love,” and I know this cause Diana Ross said so! It can’t buy you the gift of the Spirit; it can’t buy you the power of God or the passion of a heart alive in His presence. It can’t buy you **“peace”** in the darkness of night when the clash of good and evil rings loudly in your soul and the shadow of sin and shame feels like a consuming fire. It can’t buy you joy... or patience... or kindness... or goodness... or faithfulness to the things you claim to love... or gentleness of soul... or an inner authority which controls our outer actions. And you know why? Because these are the **“fruits”** of a relationship with the Spirit of Jesus, a deeply intimate relational connection we share with the Holy Spirit day after day as He fills us with His presence and His power.

The Apostle tells his younger protégé in v. 10, how **“some people, eager for money** [again, a present participle {*orego*}, ‘stretching themselves out, reaching for something’ with their greedy little grasp!], **have wandered from the Faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”** As a king far wiser than I once said, **“A faithful man will be richly blessed ...but one eager to get rich will not go**

unpunished”— Proverbs 28:20. So, are we those **“people”** ...stretching ourselves out, thinner and thinner for money, money, and more money? Reaching for it with our heart, soul, mind and strength when we should be reaching for Jesus, **“eager”** to execute the Mission He left me? To **“go forth”** into **“all nations”** under His **“authority”** and **“make disciples”** of them, **“baptizing them in the name”** of the Trinity **“and teaching them to obey everything”** Jesus’ commanded us— Matthew 28:18-20?

The Rich in This Present World.

Paul lays down the Law of the Spirit for Timothy in v. 17, saying **“Command those who are rich in this present world.”** Meaning *order* them Timothy, make it a spiritual imperative for the luxuriantly wealthy of Ephesus, and the moderately middle-class of America, to radically restructure their lives as they do what Jesus did and say what Jesus said. **“Command them, order them”** over and over again, as many times as it takes.

One, **“not to be arrogant.”** The word means to be ‘high-minded, proud and haughty;’ the attitude of the rich hasn’t changed in 2000 years, has it. **Don’t think of yourself as better than someone else because you’ve got a little more money than they do.** At this particular moment, you just happen to be a step or two above them on the ladder of success, clawing your way up the corporate hierarchy. How self-important. My advice to you ‘young professionals’— man *or* woman— is, “Don’t take yourself too seriously.” If you can learn to laugh at yourself with a sense of self-effacing humor, you’ll be much easier to be around. **Nothing in this fallen world gives us the right to look down on one made in the “image of God”... least of all something as transient as wealth.** Cause I can promise you, you won’t be taking it with you.



That part I can *guarantee*.

Secondly, “**command**” them not “**to put their hope in wealth,**” not to rest their sense of security in life or assurance for the future on the things of this world, of which “**wealth**” is at the top of the list! *Ploutos* means ‘riches, wealth, an abundance of external possessions,’ material things. **Why do we feel like it’s okay to have so much when so many have so little?** I don’t mean the rest of the U.S., I mean us here in our Community, our little Family of Faith? What gives us the right to skip over those areas where Jesus talked about feeding the poor, clothing those without, helping the homeless, providing for a Brother or Sister in need even if I have to sell something to do it? You want Scripture to back it up? **Matthew 25:31-46; Luke 6:24-36; Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-35; James 2:14-17 and 1 John 3:16-20.**

Paul’s qualifier on “**wealth**” is “**which is so uncertain.**” Don’t rest your hope on something as temporal and transient, as ‘here one minute and gone the next,’ on *anything* as “**uncertain**” as material wealth. You might be a Superstar one minute and scrounging for supper the next, a Legend in your own mind one day and broke as a politician’s conscience the next! And you have no idea when the crash is going to come. “**Put**” your “**hope in God... who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.**” **Life is meant to be lived, not worshipped.** We enjoy the lavish gifts of a gracious God, we don’t cling to them with every ounce of strength as if they are our lives! Life, worth, value, courage, conscience, and commitment come from *who you are*, not *what you own*! **Do you own what you own or does what you own, own you?** Better figure it out if you want to walk with God.

Finale— What’s Left for Us to Do?

Finally, Paul answers the question, “What’s left for us to do?” Now that he’s told us, ordered us in fact, what *not* to do, he says, “**Command them to do good.**” Use your “**wealth**” to “**do good**” for others. You seeing this? Use the resources of God, use the riches of Jesus’ grace, to do good for other people, especially of the Household of Faith.

Secondly, “**to be rich in good deeds.**” Let your life shine forth the very Light of the World, let the Master’s mercy reign in the “**good deeds**” you do.

“**And,**” the third thing is, “**to be generous** [to give freely of everything we have] **and willing to share** [Beyond ‘generous,’ it means we’re willing to sit down at a meal with, or suffer alongside of, the poor and bring them into *friendship* with us.]. [V. 19] **In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a *firm* foundation for the Coming Age** [For the ‘Coming’ Kingdom of Christ. Sounds like Jesus in Matthew 6:19-24, doesn’t it?], [*This is the purpose:*] **so that they may take hold of the Life that is truly Life.**” He’s not talking about salvation, or the Life of Eternity we receive when we trust Jesus with all we are, he’s talking about the Life of blessing and abundance Jesus spoke of in John 10:10, a Life of *joy* built on *generosity*. Think about this. Paul’s saying we experience the Life of God flowing freely within us not by what we

keep but by what we give away, not by what we hoard away for some mystical rainy day but by using the “**riches**” God’s given us {every one of us in this nation} for His glory—that His Name may go forth to the ends of the Earth, that His Word may be praised, His glory seen and His honor lifted high!

Peterson in *The Message* said, “**Tell those rich in this world’s wealth to quit being so full of themselves and so obsessed with money, which is here today and gone tomorrow. Tell them to go after God, who piles on all the riches we could ever manage— to do good, to be rich in helping others, to be extravagantly generous. If they do that, they’ll build a treasury that will last, gaining Life that is truly Life,**” 1 Timothy 6:17-19. Amen!

*Every time we could give in the Cause of our King, and we don’t, it lessens the wealth laid up for us in the Age to Come; and every time we give, letting the Holy Spirit have his way with us, it increases exponentially the riches laid up for us when this “**present world**” fades into dust. At one point Peter say’s to Jesus, “**We have left all we had to follow you!**” Jesus just sort of stops him in mid-sentence and says, “**I tell you the truth.... No one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the Kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this Age and, in the Age to Come, Eternal Life,**” Luke 18:28-30.*

The Challenge.

I challenge you to seek the face of your Lord, to come boldly and reverently, worshipfully before His Throne. In prayer, lay your life at Jesus’ feet... your family, your finances, your work and your worship, your *pride*, your *possessions*, your marriage and ministry, all the little extras of life, all the avenues of entertainment you pursue. Will you give Him authority over these things, will you sacrifice your idols for the sake of His glory?

Now is the time to decide. Are you a *believer* or are you a *worshipper*? Will you give your very life for the honor of your King? What’s holding us back right now, what are we trying to hide from God’s hand and keep hidden for ourselves? Who are we afraid of ...God or ourselves? This is not the time for empty promises. This is a moment of *radical devotion* to radical generosity, radical compassion and radical love. And we’re going to need some radical repentance to get there.