

Riches and Godliness from 1 Timothy 6

<http://www.enduringword.com/commentaries/5406.htm>

A. A word to servants.

A1. (1) A word to slaves in general.

Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and *His* doctrine may not be blasphemed.

a. **Let as many bondservants:** Paul called upon slaves to **count their own masters worthy of all honor** - to be good, respectful workers for their masters. He did this not out of a general approval of the institution of slavery, but so that God would be glorified (**so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed**).

b. **As are under the yoke:** These same principles apply to our occupations today. When we work hard and honor our employers, it glorifies God. But when we are bad workers and disrespectful to our supervisors, it brings shame on the name of Jesus Christ.

i. Colossians 3:22-24 gives the sense of this: *Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.* No matter who we work for, we really work for the Lord - and we should give the Lord both honor and a hard day of work.

c. **So that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed:** People will judge Christianity - who God is (**the name of God**) and what the Bible teaches (**and His doctrine**) based on how you conduct yourself as an employee.

i. Each Christian should ask if they are leading people *to* Jesus by how they work, or if they are leading people *away* from Jesus by their bad work and testimony at their job.

A2. (2) A special word to slaves with Christian masters.

And those who have believing masters, let them not despise *them* because they are brethren, but rather serve *them* because those who are benefited are believers and beloved. Teach and exhort these things.

a. **And those who have believing masters:** Perhaps it was easy for a slave to say, "My master doesn't know Jesus. That's why he expects me to work so hard." But if the master were a Christian, or became a Christian, the slave might think, "My brother shouldn't expect me to work so hard now; he will show me Christian love, and perhaps favor me above the other slaves, because I am a Christian also."

b. **Let them not despise them because they are brethren, but rather serve them:** We can almost imagine a slave saying, "My master is my brother! We are equal before the Lord. He has no right to tell me what to do." This attitude ignores the fact that God calls us into many relationships where submission is commanded - in the home, in the church, in the workplace. Our equality in Jesus doesn't eliminate God's order of authority.

c. But rather serve them because those who are benefited are believers and beloved:

Upon this principle, Christian slaves with Christian masters were not free to despise their masters for expecting them to work, and to work hard. Rather, the slave should be even more dedicated to work because he served a brother.

i. We should never expect special treatment because our boss or supervisor is a Christian. Instead, that should motivate us to work all the harder, because we can then be a blessing to another brother.

ii. Warren Wiersbe relates the story of a young lady who had left a secular job to work for a Christian organization. She had been there about a month and was really disillusioned. "I thought it was going to be heaven on earth," she complained. "Instead, there are nothing but problems." Wiersbe asked her if she was working just as hard for her new boss as she did in the secular job. The look on her face said, "No!" So, Wiersbe told her, "Try working harder, and show your boss real respect. Just because all of you in the office are saved doesn't mean you can do less than your best." She took his advice and the problems cleared up.

d. Teach and exhort these things: This teaching was especially important in the ancient world, where slaves might be treated very differently from master to master, and where there was sometimes intense racism and hatred between slaves and masters.

i. Christianity arose in a social setting where slavery was commonplace. There were some 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire. Some slaves held privileged positions; other slaves were treated with great abuse.

ii. Paul and others in the New Testament did not call for a violent revolution against the institution of slavery (which would have failed miserably). Yet through the gospel, they did effectively destroy the foundations of slavery - racism, greed, class hatred - and made a civilization without slavery possible.

iii. The church itself was a place where slavery was destroyed. It was not uncommon for a master and a slave to go to church together, where the slave would be an elder in the church, and the master was expected to submit to the slave's spiritual leadership! Such radical thinking was an offense to many, but glorified God and eventually destroyed slavery.

B. Money, contentment and godliness.

B1. (3-5) Warning against those who misuse God's word.

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, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, 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.

a. **If anyone teaches otherwise:** In drawing to the close of the letter, Paul referred again to a theme he mentioned in the first chapter - that Timothy must be on guard against those who would misuse the word of God.

i. **Teaches otherwise** in this context may mean replacing the plain teaching of God's word with a focus on prophecies and visions and strange spiritual experiences people claim. This was a great danger that Paul warned Timothy against.

ii. Poole on **if anyone teaches otherwise:** "If there be any person who either more publicly or more privately shall take upon him to instruct people otherwise." Some of the most dangerous teaching in the church isn't done from a pulpit, but in informal, private conversations.

b. **And does not consent to wholesome words:** Paul warned Timothy against the argumentative heretic, who has left the word of God to promote his own ideas - who **does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ**. He warned Timothy against those who seemed to treat the Word of God more as a plaything instead of as a precious gift.

i. You don't have to be an active opponent of God's word to be an enemy of it. If we fail to give the Bible its rightful place in our life and in our preaching, we oppose God's word.

ii. "It is possible not to profess any ungodly or manifest error and yet to corrupt the doctrine of godliness by silly boastful babbling. For when there is no progress or edification from any teaching, it has already departed from the institution of Christ." (Calvin)

c. **Even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ:** This might seem like an unnecessary warning against an obvious danger. Yet the warning was necessary, because those who misuse God's truth don't advertise themselves that way. They often claim to honor God's word while in fact misusing it.

i. There are different ways that people do **not consent** to the truth of God's Word.

- Some *deny* God's Word.
- Some *ignore* God's Word.
- Some *explain away* God's Word.
- Some *twist* God's Word using it as a toy to be played with in debate and disputes.

ii. One can be surrounded by God's truth; one can even memorize the Bible, and *not* have it effect the life for eternity. Curiosity or interest in God's Word without submission to it is a grave danger.

iii. In our day - a time when we are overwhelmed with useless information - it is easy to regard the Bible as useless information or as a source of answers to trivia questions, but not as a book with truth that confronts and transforms my life. Bible study is *not* trivial pursuit; to treat the Bible as a book of useless information is to misuse it.

d. **He is proud, knowing nothing:** This describes those who misuse God's Word. Yet, as all the proud, they don't see or admit to their lack of knowledge. And, like most proud people, they are able to convince others that they are *experts* in God's truth, when they actually misuse it.

i. To not allow God's Word to speak for itself - to put your own "spin" on it as modern politicians and public relations people do - is the worst kind of pride. It shows someone has more confidence in their own wisdom and opinions than in the straightforward truth of God. Surely, these proud people are those **knowing nothing**.

ii. It is nothing but *pride* that could make me think that my stories, my anecdotes, my opinions, my humor, could be more important for you to hear than the plain Word of God.

e. **Obsessed with disputes and arguments:** Those who misuse God's Word may be expert debaters on their current doctrinal hobby-horse; but their desire to constantly debate some aspect of doctrine shows their unwillingness to humbly receive the truth.

i. Paul isn't speaking about people who inquire or question in a genuine desire to learn; but those who ask questions or start discussion mainly to show others how smart they are.

f. **Envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions:** This is the fruit of the **disputes and arguments** of those who misuse God's truth. Their presence in a church body is the source of all kinds of division and discontent; though they may appear to be experts on the Bible, they actually do damage to God's church. Therefore, Paul warned Timothy, "**From such withdraw yourself.**"

i. Timothy should expect that such men would:

- **Envy** him and his office (without admitting to it).
- That they would create **strife** among the Christians.
- That they would promote **reviling** of Timothy and other leaders in the church.
- That they would be the source of **evil suspicions** - always suspecting Timothy and other leaders in the church of evil motives and plots.

ii. Timothy needed this warning, because such dangerous people are not as obvious as one might think.

iii. **Useless wranglings:** "Endless and needless discourses. . . . The Greek word signifieth galling one another with disputes, or rubbing one against another, as scabbed sheep will, and so spreading the infection." (Trapp)

g. **Who suppose that godliness is a means of gain:** This is another characteristic of those who misuse God's truth. Their interest in the things of God is not entirely for God's glory, but motivated in part by desire for wealth and comfort.

i. "For these men all Christianity is to be measured by the gains it brings . . . Paul forbids the servants of Christ to have any dealings with such men." (Calvin)

ii. Very commonly, Christianity is presented today on the basis of what you will *gain* by following Jesus: personal success and happiness, a stronger family, a more secure life. These things may be true to some degree, but we must never market the gospel as a product that will fix every life problem.

iii. When the gospel is marketed this way, it makes followers of Jesus who are completely unprepared for tough times. After all, if the "Jesus product" isn't working, why not try another brand? Also, this sales approach takes the focus off Jesus Himself, and puts the

focus on what He will give us. Many have their hearts set on the blessings, not the One who blesses us.

iv. While not ignoring the blessings of following Jesus Christ, we must proclaim the need to follow Jesus because He is God, and we owe Him everything as our Creator. What is right before God, and what glorifies Him, is more important than whatever benefit we may gain.

v. We need to see Christians who are more concerned with what glorifies God than with what benefits me.

h. **From such withdraw yourself:** Timothy is told to deliberately *not* associate with those who receive or present the gospel with this kind of marketing approach.

i. "He does not only forbid Timothy from imitating them, but tells him to avoid them as harmful pests. Although they do not openly oppose the Gospel, but make a profession of it, yet their company is infectious. Besides, if the crowd sees us to be familiar with these men, there is a danger that they will use our friendship to insinuate themselves into its favour. We should therefore take great pains to make everyone understand that we are quite different from them, and have nothing at all in common with them." (Calvin)

B2. (6) The true gain of godliness.

Now godliness with contentment is great gain.

a. **Now godliness:** Paul told Timothy that those who misuse God's Word wrongly think godliness is a means of material gain. Knowing his statement might be misunderstood, he followed up with an explanation.

b. **Now godliness with contentment is great gain:** It is true that godliness is **great gain**; but only when accompanied by **contentment**.

i. "The word here used for *contentment* is *autarkeia* . . . By it they meant a complete *self-sufficiency*. They meant a frame of mind which was completely independent of all outward things, and which carried the secret of happiness within itself. Contentment never comes from the possession of external things." (Barclay)

c. **With contentment:** When one does not live by "the itch for more," and one's life is not dominated by shopping for and acquiring material things, we can have the kind of **contentment** in God and in His will for our lives.

i. This is a slippery area in the Christian life. It is very easy to come up with reasons - excuses, that is - why these sins of greed and materialism don't apply to us. But whenever we think getting something material, or getting more of it, will answer our life's needs, we lack this contentment. Whenever we are deeply grieved at material loss, we lack this contentment. Whenever we get an inordinate pleasure from buying or having some material thing, we lack this contentment.

d. **Godliness with contentment is great gain:** Paul knew this kind of **contentment** first hand; here is his testimony in Philippians 4:11-13: *Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: 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. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

i. It is true that material possessions in and of themselves do not corrupt us; Paul could *abound* in material things and still keep it all in proper perspective. But too many use this truth to excuse their own materialism and carnal lack of contentment.

ii. **Contentment** is essential, and difficult for many reasons:

- We can only find contentment when our hearts are rooted in eternal things; and contentment is essential because it shows we are living with an eternal perspective, not only trying to feather an earthly nest.
- It is hard to be content, because our consumer culture feeds our lack of contentment, by rewarding us when we are discontent, and with advertising that tries to make us feel discontent without a product.
- It is hard to be content, because we almost always desire far more than we need.

e. **Godliness with contentment is great gain:** Godliness really can bring almost unbelievable contentment; but before it can, we must be *transformed by the renewing of your mind* (Romans 12:2) - to start putting material things in their proper priority next to spiritual things.

i. It's easy for many Christians to say they have this contentment; but whether they have it or not is often more truthfully known by their spending and shopping habits. How much of a place does shopping and buying have in your life? How does material loss affect your happiness? How happy do you get from having some material thing?

ii. When we live and act without contentment, we are trying to fill needs in our lives - a need to be "somebody," a need to feel secure or cared for, a need to have excitement and newness in our lives - most people try to fulfill these needs with material things, but they can only really be met by a spiritual relationship with the God who made us.

iii. Real **contentment** isn't too difficult for those whose real home is heaven. "It requires but little of this world's goods to satisfy a man who feels himself to be a citizen of another country, and knows that this is not his *rest*." (Clarke)

B3. (7-8) The heart of contentment.

For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.

a. **We brought nothing into this world:** A baby is born not only penniless, but without even a pocket to put pennies in. Just as certainly, **we can carry nothing out** - the things that make a man rich in this world mean nothing in the world to come.

b. **It is certain we can carry nothing out:** A heart of contentment begins with seeing our material possessions and resources in an *eternal* perspective.

i. It has been wisely observed that a moving trailer never follows a hearse. Every thing one might take with them to the world beyond is left behind. Gold is a precious commodity on earth; in heaven God uses it to pave the streets.

ii. Jesus once told a parable that has troubled some people. In Luke 16:1-14, He spoke of a dishonest manager, who was about to be called to account. Knowing he will be fired, he began to settle accounts with his master's debtors at terms favorable to the debtors, so they would treat him kindly when the master fired him. The master ended up complimenting the manager for his shrewd tactics (presumably before he fired him). The manager was praiseworthy for two reasons. First, he knew he would be called to account for his life and he took it seriously. Secondly, he took advantage of his *present* position to arrange a comfortable *future*. We can use our material resources *right now* for eternal good - even though we can't bring them with us.

iii. We **can carry nothing out** - but we can *send ahead* eternal blessing and reward through wise use of our resources right now.

c. **Having food and clothing**: After an eternal perspective, a heart of contentment must have a humble heart - a heart that can be content with simple things.

i. We most all become jaded over the years, and our over-stimulated culture is effective at producing this in us. Things that used to satisfy us are no longer good enough. The constant hunger for more and more, for more and better, for new and improved, all work against real contentment.

B4. (9-10) The folly of the greedy heart.

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. 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.

a. **Those who desire to be rich**: Significantly, the **desire** for riches is far more dangerous than the riches themselves - and it isn't only the poor who desire to be rich, it is the rich who want *more* riches.

i. Poor does not mean godly and rich ungodly; nor is it true the other way around. There were many remarkably godly men in the Bible who were almost unbelievably rich, such as Abraham, David, and Solomon.

ii. But the godly rich have the heart like the Psalmist in Psalm 62:10: *If riches increase, do not set your heart on them.*

b. **Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare**: This desire for riches tempts our heart away from eternal riches, and ensnares us in a trap few can escape - always dreaming of riches, and always setting one's heart on them.

i. The **desire to be rich** can really only be satisfied in Jesus Christ, and satisfied with spiritual riches rather than material ones. Everything else falls short.

c. **The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil**: The love of money can motivate any evil on this earth. There is no sin that cannot be committed for the sake of money.

d. **Pierced themselves through with many sorrows:** This is the fate of those who live in the love of money. They are *not* satisfied. We sometimes want the opportunity to find out if riches can satisfy, but we should trust the Word of God and the experience of many.

i. "So do these strangle, drown, poison their precious souls with profits, pleasures, and preferments, and many times meet with perdition and destruction, that is, with a double destruction, temporal and eternal, as some expound it." (Trapp)

B5. (11-16) True riches: serving a Great King.

But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. 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. 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, that you keep *this* commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing, which He will manifest in His own time, *He who is* the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom *be* honor and everlasting power. Amen.

a. **But you, O man of God:** Timothy was commanded to be different from those who lived for riches and material wealth. He was to **flee** the proud arguments of those who misuse God's Word and who suppose that we should follow God just for what we can get out of it.

b. **Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness:** Instead of pride and riches, Timothy was to make these things his pursuit. These are things which are often not valued in our present age, but are very valuable to God.

i. This challenge to leave some things and follow hard after some other things isn't just directed to Timothy, but to everyone who would be a **man** [or woman] **of God** - as opposed to being a man of *this* world.

c. **Fight the good fight of faith:** Going God's way - against the flow of this world - won't be easy. Therefore, Timothy had to have a soldier's determination.

i. God calls us to be fighters, but to fight **the good fight of faith** - a fight where some may lose a battle here and there, but they will carry on the fight with great determination until the war is over - when we **lay hold on eternal life**.

ii. Timothy was drafted into this war: **To which you were also called**. But Timothy also volunteered: **And have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses**. Timothy had to consider both so as to set his thinking right for the fight. God had called him, and he had also freely chosen.

d. **In the sight of God who gives life to all things:** Since Paul called Timothy to a difficult battle, it was good for him to know that the orders were given under this great God. Timothy had an obligation to serve the Creator who gave him life.

i. The denial of God as Creator has done wide damage in our culture. Some of the biggest damage has come from the simple fact that many people no longer believe they have a Creator they must honor and be accountable to.

e. **Christ Jesus:** This is who gave Timothy the difficult command. Jesus Himself knew what it was to fulfill a difficult command, because He **witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate** and did it in several ways.

i. Jesus admitted the truth about Himself, agreeing with Pilate's statement that Jesus was the King of the Jews (Matthew 27:11).

ii. Jesus testified to Pilate about the sovereignty of God, saying *You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given to you from above* (John 19:11). Jesus let Pilate know that God was in charge, not Pilate.

iii. Jesus was silent about specific accusations, refusing to defend Himself, but leaving His life in the will of God the Father (Matthew 27:14). "For Christ made His *confession before Pilate* not in many words but in reality, that is by His voluntary submission to death." (Calvin)

iv. In each of these ways, Jesus made a *good confession before Pontius Pilate*; so when Timothy is told to live up to the *good confession* he made (1 Timothy 6:12), he is simply being told to do what Jesus did.

f. **Until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing:** This was *how long* Timothy was supposed to fight the good fight. There is always danger that a good effort will simply not last long enough, and end in defeat.

g. **He who is:** Knowing who Jesus is equipped Timothy to fight the good fight. History is filled with example of armies that have been led to spectacular victories because the men knew and loved their leaders. Therefore, here Paul described Jesus to Timothy.

i. He is **the blessed and only Potentate** - the One who alone has all power and strength, who rules over the universe from an occupied throne in heaven.

ii. He is the **King of kings and Lord of lords**; the majesty of man fades in comparison to the glory of Jesus. The richest, smartest, most influential persons on earth are midgets next to King Jesus.

iii. He **alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see**: He is holy. Jesus is not merely a super-man, He is the God-man; truly immortal without beginning or end; with a glory which if fully revealed would strike any human dead.

iv. **To whom be honor and everlasting power**: Knowing who this Jesus is should bring forth a response - not primarily, "what can He do for me?" but a response of simple and profound *worship* - declaring **honor and everlasting power** towards this great God.
Amen!

h. **To whom be honor and everlasting power**: Paul praised the glory and honor of the exalted, enthroned Lord Jesus Christ. He is a unique man (**who alone has immortality**) and a glorified man (**unapproachable light**).

B6. (17-19) A final word to the rich.

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. *Let them* do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

- a. **Rich in this present age:** This phrase puts it all in perspective. These ones might be rich now, but they must use their riches responsibly if they will be rich in the age to come.
- b. **Not to be haughty:** Pride is a constant danger with riches. It is very easy to believe that we *are* more because we *have* more than another man has.
- c. **Nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God:** God knows our tendency to trust in riches instead of in Him. He guards us against this danger because He wants us to trust in that which is most certain - in Him and not in **uncertain riches**.
- d. **Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give:** Being a giver, and doing good with our resources is what guards our heart from materialism and trusting in uncertain riches.
 - i. Many think the main reason for giving unto the Lord is because the church needs money. No. The most important reason to give is because *you* need to be a giver. It is God's way of guarding you against greed and trust in uncertain riches. God will provide for His work even if you do not give; but what will happen to *you*?
 - ii. If you do not give of your material things to the Lord's work, how will you be **storing up for** [yourself] **a good foundation for the time to come**? How will you **lay hold on eternal life**? Will there not be some - perhaps many - who do not enter heaven because they heart was really far more comfortable here on earth with its material rewards?
- e. **Lay hold on eternal life:** Paul's idea was to Timothy, "Leave the pursuit of money aside and be content with your work as a minister of the gospel. Your hand is not big enough to lay hold of two things. Therefore, since you can only have one, see that it is the vital thing. Lay hold on eternal life."
 - i. "From this it is evident that if he lays hold on eternal life, he will have to fight for it; and that if he has to fight, he can only fight by laying hold upon eternal life with tenacious grip." (Spurgeon)

B7. (20-21) Conclusion: A final charge.

O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane *and* idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge; by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith. Grace *be* with you. Amen.

- a. **O Timothy!** Paul repeated a theme often used, challenging Timothy to distinguish between what comes from God (**that which was committed to your trust**), and what comes from man (**vain babblings**); and to guard against becoming enamored with what comes from man.

i. Paul had confidence in Timothy and he did trust him. Yet Paul also knew how great the power of seduction is, and how high the stakes are - so he warned, and warned, and warned again.

b. **Guard what was committed to your trust:** The gospel is a **trust** committed to pastors like Timothy; but also to all believers. And when that trust is broken, **some have strayed concerning the faith**. We must do all that we can to keep this **trust**.

©2013 David Guzik - No distribution beyond personal use without permission

<http://www.enduringword.com/commentaries/5406.htm>