

Letters For Leaders – 1 Timothy (Part 7)

The four letters we are studying in this series were written by the Apostle Paul, probably while he was in prison toward the end of his ministry. They are unique among all his writings because they are PERSONAL, addressed to individuals in leadership roles rather than to churches as a whole. Also, Paul has had a “mentoring role” in the lives and ministries of each of these young leaders, so he feels at liberty to speak freely. Here more than anywhere else we see Paul being transparent about ministry.

In chapter 1, Paul charges Timothy to fight FOR truth and fight AGAINST error, and specifically deals with a group of false teachers who abused the Old Testament law. He also shares part of his TESTIMONY – “if God could save and use the ‘chief’ of sinners, He can save anyone!”

In chapter 2, Paul exhorts that prayer should be our first priority, and follows this immediately with his teaching on holiness - because praying for God to do what WE want when we won’t do what HE wants is the ultimate hypocrisy! He also affirms the woman’s role in the church.

In chapter 3, Paul lists qualifications for “senior leaders” (bishops – “overseers”) and “second leaders” (deacons – “servants”). He makes it obvious that, for all leaders, CHARACTER is much more important than mere COMPETENCE. He reminds Timothy of the high PRIVILEGE of leading the church, which is the “pillar (display) and ground (protection) of the truth” – and he emphasizes the central truth of the Apostolic church, which is the Oneness of God (“the mystery of godliness”).

In chapter 4, Paul repeats the warning he gave to the Ephesians in Acts 20 about false teachers departing from the faith (changing DOCTRINE) and giving heed to seducing spirits (changing LIFESTYLE). They eventually get to the place of NO CONVICTION (“conscience seared”) and become APOSTATE (“willful turning away from truth; rebellion”) instead of APOSTOLIC. Paul emphasizes repeatedly to Timothy that BELIEVING and BEHAVING always go together. He also exhorts Timothy, “let no man despise thy youth” but “be thou an example of the believers.” This takes consistent and progressive discipline (“exercise”). So, “neglect not the gift that is in thee!” and “take heed unto thyself!”

In chapter 5, Paul turns to Timothy’s relationships with ELDERS in the church. Always, the first principle of dealing with elders is HONOR. Godly widows are to be cared for by the church if they have no family to do so, and if they are not “idle.” The elders that TEACH and LEAD the church full-time are to receive “double honour” (literally, “generous pay”) so they can make the church their sole responsibility.

And finally, Paul turns his attention to the issue of MONEY ...

Money has the greatest potential to REPLACE God in our lives – and how leaders handle money either qualifies or disqualifies them.

1 Timothy 6:1-2 Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort.

At the time Paul wrote this epistle, it is estimated that one-half of Rome’s population were SLAVES to the other half of the population! Many slaves had a good life, but legally they were not considered “persons.” Of course the Gospel (which prevents “neither bond nor free” from being saved – Galatians 3:28, Colossians 3:11) especially appealed to slaves, and many became Christians. When their duties allowed, they would fellowship in local assemblies where being a slave was not a handicap.

However, there was a problem. Some slaves used their newfound freedom in Christ as an excuse to disobey and defy their masters. They needed to learn that their spiritual freedom in Christ did not alter their social position, even though the church accepted them as equals. Since we have neither slaves nor masters today, where do these principles apply? **In the workplace, where we have employees and employers!**

In chapter five, Paul told us to treat our fellow Christians with HONOR – and now he extends that principle to the workplace. “Under the yoke” (6:1) means “joined by OBLIGATION” – so this certainly applies to our JOBS. A Christian who is a disrespectful, argumentative, dishonest or lazy employee causes their **UNSAVED** employer to “blaspheme” (“speak evil of”) the God they serve and the doctrine they believe.

It’s amazing how little human nature changes over the centuries! Next, Paul admonishes employees with **SAVED** employers – because it’s all too often the case that Christian employees think, “**My boss is my brother!**” and use that as an excuse for poor performance on the job. Instead, this is the way we should think and act at work ...

- Don’t **DESPISE** (literally, “show no esteem”) your boss. Do you work just as hard for your saved boss as you did for your unsaved boss?
- Do **SERVICE** (literally or figuratively, “serve as a slave”) for your boss. Your job is about what your boss wants, not what you want! Do you only do the minimum required, or do you go the second mile?
- Be a **BENEFIT** (literally, “worker of good”) for your boss. Are you a burden or a blessing to your workplace? You should be the best employee there! Your boss should be glad that they hired a “brother.”

1 Timothy 6:3-5 If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.

It's comforting to me as a pastor that Timothy had to deal with "pseudo-spiritual" people 2000 years ago! These are people who are "so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good." They've always got a "word from God" to give to others, but their TALK isn't backed up by their WALK. Paul teaches both Timothy and Titus that what we teach ("doctrine") must be "according to godliness" (6:3) – that is, it must be reflected in our LIFESTYLE. And here, the context for "godliness" is what you do at work! **IF YOU ARE LAZY, YOU ARE NOT SPIRITUAL. PERIOD.**

Paul paints an unflattering picture of "pseudo-spiritual" people here ...

- **PROUD.** This word means "lifted up with pride, inflated with conceit," and comes from a root word meaning "enveloped with smoke." You can't teach them anything because they are always "more spiritual" than anyone else – all the while hiding behind "smoke and mirrors."
- **KNOWING NOTHING.** This phrase means "not even comprehending the basics." All their "spiritual revelations" are for nothing, because they aren't even doing the fundamentals of the Christian life.
- **DOTING ABOUT QUESTIONS AND STRIFES OF WORDS.** The word "doting" means "having a diseased appetite (i.e. hungering for the wrong things), to hanker after, to harp upon." They argue about minor matters and are always trying to circumvent the authority of church leadership by contending for their interpretation of Scripture (which always just happens to emphasize areas they think they are strong in, while ignoring areas where they need accountability!).

The fruit from "pseudo-spiritual" people is not spiritual! Instead, their attitude and actions promote "envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings" (6:4-5) – in other words, a lot of ARGUING about Scripture instead of SUBMITTING to the authority ordained by Scripture. Paul says that they have "corrupt minds" (6:5) and that they are "destitute of the truth" (6:5) – this expression means that are "robbing" themselves of truth, all the while they think they are discovering truth!

In the context of EMPLOYMENT, these people suppose that "gain is godliness" – that anything furthering their own agenda is permissible, because after all, their agenda must be God's agenda too! Paul tells us to "withdraw" from them. **"GAIN" IS NOT ALWAYS "GODLINESS"!**

1 Timothy 6:6-10 But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

GAIN IS NOT ALWAYS GODLINESS (IN FACT RARELY). HOWEVER, GODLINESS – "WITH CONTENTMENT" – IS ALWAYS GREAT GAIN.

Living a godly life is REAL gain, not only for now but for eternity as well. However, we won't realize that unless we live "**with contentment**" – literally, "having an inner sufficiency that keeps us at peace in spite of outward circumstances." And although Paul is referring primarily to our FINANCIAL circumstances in this context, he uses the same word later to describe ALL circumstances we face – even UNFAIR circumstances.

Philippians 4:11-13 Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

The word "contentment" (6:6) also has the sense of being "self-satisfied" – that is, being satisfied with the life God has given us, and not being envious of the blessings of others, or striving for material gain to the point of neglecting our walk with God. Many people mistakenly think their financial success is the "blessing" of God, when really it is God "cursing" them by giving them up to the idols they desire more than Him.

"For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out (6:7)." We quote this verse at funerals, but really we need to think about it every day – you didn't bring it with you, and you can't take it with you! **A life that is not dedicated to eternal things is a wasted life!**

If you've got FOOD and "RAIMENT" (literally "covering" – so it could refer to clothing or to shelter), if you have the BASICS, then be CONTENT. Why? Because money has the greatest potential to REPLACE God in your life! **Those who are always trying to get MORE in their material life always end up with LESS in their spiritual life.** They fall into temptation and a trap ("snare" – 6:9), and they give in to many foolish and hurtful longings ("lusts" – 6:9). Ironically, those who tried so hard to GAIN end up experiencing LOSS – both now ("destruction") and in eternity ("perdition"). Paul's metaphor is striking (and terrifying) – he says that these people "drown" (6:9) their eternal soul in their earthly ambition.

THE LOVE OF MONEY IS THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL. It is not “money” that is evil, because money is a necessity for us to exist in society. It is the “**LOVE** of money” that is evil – in fact, that is the **ROOT** of ALL evil. The word “**philargyria**” has the sense of “covetous, always wanting **MORE**” – **these people put making money before pleasing God.** As a result, they “[err] from the faith” (6:10) and “[pierce] themselves through with many sorrows” (6:10). However, in their mad quest for **MORE** they become oblivious to their **eternal** problem and their **temporal** problem. All too often, by the time “many sorrows” become apparent, it’s too late to recover all the truly important things they have missed in life.

1 Timothy 6:11-12 But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.

Paul’s exhortation to Timothy is “LIVE DIFFERENT THAN THAT!” Leaders need to “**FLEE**” (literally, “separate yourself”) from the covetousness of materialism, because **MATERIALISM DESTROYS MINISTRIES.** Instead of using their energies to run toward money, they need to run toward “righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness” (6:11). Instead of striving for **FINANCES**, they need to “fight the good fight of **FAITH**” (6:12), which is the only battle that is ultimately worth winning. Paul reminds Timothy of his private **CALL** and his public **PROFESSION** – “**Timothy, you’re a LEADER, and ‘many witnesses’ are watching you! So get it right when it comes to MONEY!**”

1 Timothy 6:13-16 I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession; That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.

Again Paul uses his “commanding officer” voice – “I give thee charge!” Timothy (and we) can do this because God “quickeneth” (6:13) all things – that is, God “enables” us to live and to lead in a way that pleases Him. When he says “**AND** before Christ Jesus” (6:13), Paul is not talking about two persons – rather, he is stressing how God came in flesh to give us a **PATTERN** for living. “*Jesus didn’t give in even when He was on trial for His life, so Timothy, you can stand regardless of what you are facing!*”

The coming of Christ motivates us to keep His commandments and live lives “without spot” (“unblemished”) and “unrebukeable” (“blameless”).

Far from being a Scripture about “two persons,” this is one of Paul’s emphatic declarations of the **ONENESS** of God ... **JESUS** is “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (6:15).

- God is the only being who has **IMMORTALITY**. But because Jesus came, now we can experience immortality!
- God is so holy (“dwelling in the light”) that no man can **APPROACH** Him. But because Jesus came, now we can approach God!
- God is a Spirit, so He cannot be **SEEN**. But because Jesus came, now we can see God! I’m glad I know who **JESUS** is!

It seems odd to us that Paul would end his epistle to a young leader by talking about **MONEY**. The coming of the Lord would seem to be a more appropriate ending! That is, until we realize that **MONEY has the greatest potential to REPLACE God in our lives.** Paul teaches us that the way leaders handle money either qualifies or disqualifies them.

1 Timothy 6:17-19 Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

These verses are written to “them that are rich in this world,” which includes **ALL** of us! We’re so busy trying to **GET** rich in North America that we don’t realize we already **ARE** rich. An “average” income here is in the top 5% of incomes around the world. And the problem with being rich is that studies show the richer people get, the smaller percentage of their money they give away. They get infected with “the love of money.” They are “rich in **THIS** world,” but not rich in the **NEXT** world!

Paul tells these rich people not to be highminded, or “proud of their possessions.” He exhorts them not to put their trust in material things, which are uncertain, but to trust in God who gave everything for them to enjoy in the first place! Then he gives some very practical commands ...

- **DO GOOD.** Use money to accomplish something for God’s Kingdom.
- **BE RICH IN GOOD WORKS.** (*repetition*) Be spiritually wealthy!
- **READY TO DISTRIBUTE.** Have a plan to give for the sake of others.
- **WILLING TO COMMUNICATE.** Be a “sharer.” Be “liberal, generous.”

The ONLY way to break the grip of money on our lives is by GIVING. Giving into God’s Kingdom isn’t so much a sacrifice as it is an investment – we get eternal life, and a reward (“good foundation” – 6:19) in Heaven.

1 Timothy 6:20-21 O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called: Which some professing have erred concerning the faith. Grace be with thee. Amen.

God had committed the truth of the Gospel to Paul, and Paul had committed it to Timothy. **The most important task of a young leader is to KEEP (not change!) that which has been committed to them!**

Paul tells Timothy to AVOID that which is “profane.” This word means “to cross a threshold,” and has the sense of leaving what one has been taught. Some people, some thinking, some conversations, and some activities cross a line that is spiritually dangerous – AVOID THEM! “Vain babblings” literally means “empty or fruitless discussion.” There are some people who just want to argue, and it is pointless to waste your time on them. Jesus said that having discussions with them is like casting “pearls before swine” (Matthew 7:6), so Paul says AVOID THEM!

The word “science” (6:20) is from the Greek word “gnosis,” and refers to a specific group in the first century. The **Gnostics** claimed to have a “new revelation” that was greater than what the Apostles taught. Their teaching divided the material world from the spiritual world, so it supposedly allowed their followers to live however they wanted on the outside, while possessing a special “knowledge” on the inside that elevated them above others. They looked down on Apostolic Christians as “in bondage” and inferior, and they opposed the New Testament church (“oppositions” in 6:20 means “a conflict of teachings”). They had no true revelation; it was a revelation “falsely so called” (6:20). Those who professed it had “erred” from the faith (literally, “missed the mark, swerved, deviated from truth” – 6:21). And they couldn’t even see it! Not much has changed in 2000 years, has it?

It’s not just wrong MOTIVES (i.e. a desire for money) that cause leaders to go astray. Wrong TEACHING is even more spiritually destructive! No one starts out thinking, “I’m going to backslide.” Backsliding happens when we allow little things, little thoughts, little lies, little sins to work their way into our hearts and lives. Backsliding happens when we ignore the spiritual authority God has placed over us. **And backsliding always happens INTERNALLY before it appears EXTERNALLY.**

This is why Paul exhorts Timothy to “KEEP” (6:20) what he has received – **because if we don’t make an effort to KEEP it, we will LOSE it.**

Paul closes his letter by using one of his favorite words ... “GRACE be with thee” (6:21). Grace is not an EXCUSE to participate in sin; grace is God’s ENABLING power to live above sin. Every Christian needs grace, but LEADERS especially need grace to survive and thrive in ministry!