

## Orders from Headquarters (1 Timothy 6)

This chapter continues Paul's advice to Timothy on ministering to the various kinds of believers in the church. The atmosphere is military, for Paul used words that belong to the army: "Fight the good fight of faith" (1 Tim. 6:12). "I give thee charge" (1 Tim. 6:13, which is the same military term used in 1:3). "Charge them that are rich" (1 Tim. 6:17). "O Timothy, keep [guard] that which is committed to thy trust" (1 Tim. 6:20). In other words, you might say Paul was the general, giving Timothy orders from the Lord, the Commander in Chief.

D. L. Moody did not want his soloist, Ira Sankey, to use "Onward, Christian Soldiers" in their evangelistic campaigns. Moody felt that the church he saw was very unlike an army. If the average military man on our side in World War II had behaved toward his superiors and their orders the way the average Christian behaves toward the Lord, we probably would have lost the war! Instead of "Onward, Christian Soldiers," someone has suggested that perhaps we ought to sing "Backward, Christian Soldiers."

Paul instructed Timothy how to minister to four more groups in the church, and also how to keep his own life in the will of God.

### 1. Christian Slaves (6:1–2)

Some historians have estimated that half of the population of the Roman Empire was composed of slaves. Many of these people were educated and cultured, but legally they were not considered persons at all. The gospel message of salvation and freedom in Christ appealed to the slaves, and many of them became believers. (The word translated "servant" in the KJV New Testament usually means "slave.") When slaves were able to get away from their household duties, they would fellowship in local assemblies where being a slave was not a handicap (Gal. 3:28).

But there was a problem: Some slaves used their newfound freedom in Christ as an excuse to disobey, if not defy, their masters. They needed to learn that their spiritual freedom in Christ did not alter their social position, even though they were accepted graciously into the fellowship of the church.

Slaves with unbelieving masters (v. 1). No Christian master would consider his slaves "under the yoke," but would treat them with love and respect (Col. 4:1; Philem. 16). For a slave to rebel against an unsaved master would bring disgrace on the gospel. "The name of God" and His doctrine would be blasphemed (Rom. 2:24). This is one reason Paul and the early missionaries did not go around preaching against the sinful institution of slavery. Such a practice would have branded the church as a militant group trying to undermine the social order, and the progress of the gospel would have been greatly hindered.

Slaves with believing masters (v. 2). The danger here is that a Christian slave might take advantage of his master because both are saved. "My master is my brother!" a slave might argue. "Since we are equal, he has no right to tell me what to do!" This attitude would create serious problems both in the homes and in the churches.

Paul gave three reasons why Christian slaves should show respect for their believing masters and not take advantage of them. The most obvious reason is their masters are Christians ("faithful" = believing). How can one believer take advantage of another believer? Second, their masters are beloved. Love does not rebel or look for opportunities to escape responsibility. Finally, both master and servant benefit from obedience ("partakers of the benefit" can apply to both of them). There is a mutual blessing when Christians serve each other in the will of God.

I recall counseling a young woman who resigned from a secular job to go to work in a Christian organization. She had been there about a month and was completely disillusioned.

"I thought it was going to be heaven on earth," she complained. "Instead, there are nothing but problems."

"Are you working just as hard for your Christian boss as you did for your other boss?" I asked. The look on her face gave me the answer. "Try working harder," I advised, "and show him real respect. Just because all of you in the office are saved doesn't mean you can do less than your best." She took my advice and her problems cleared up.

## **2. False Teachers (6:3–10)**

Paul had opened this letter with warnings about false teachers (1 Tim. 1:3ff.) and had even refuted some of their dangerous teachings (1 Tim. 4:1ff.). The spiritual leaders in the local church must constantly oversee what is being taught because it is easy for false doctrines to slip in (Acts 20:28–32). A pastor I know discovered a Sunday school teacher who was sharing his “visions” instead of teaching God’s Word!

The marks of these false teachers (vv. 3–5a). The first mark is that they refused to adhere to “the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching” (1 Tim. 6:3 NIV). This teaching is godly and it promotes godliness. Isaiah’s first test of any teacher was “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa. 8:20). It is important that a church “hold fast the form of sound [healthy] words” (2 Tim. 1:13).

A second mark is the teacher’s own attitude. Instead of being humble, a false teacher is proud, yet he has nothing to be proud about because he does not know anything (1 Tim. 6:4; also 1:7).

A believer who understands the Word will have a burning heart, not a big head (Luke 24:32; and see Dan. 9:1–20). This “conceited attitude” causes a teacher to argue about minor matters concerning “words” (1 Tim. 6:3). Instead of feeding on the “wholesome words of ... Christ,” you might say he gets sick about questions. The word *doting* (1 Tim. 6:4) means “filled with a morbid desire, sick.” The result of such unspiritual teaching is “envy, quarreling, malicious talk, evil suspicions, and constant friction” (1 Tim. 6:4b–5a NIV).

The tragedy of all this is that the people are “robbed of the truth” (1 Tim. 6:5 NIV) while they think they are discovering the truth! They think that the weekly arguments in their meetings, during which they exchange their ignorance, are a means of growing in grace; meanwhile the result is a loss of character, not an improvement.

The motive for their teaching (vv. 5b–10). These false teachers supposed “that godliness is a way of financial gain” (literal translation). “Godliness” here (1 Tim. 6:5) means “the profession of Christian faith” and not true holy living in the power of the Spirit. They used their religious profession as a means to make money. What they did was not a true ministry; it was just a religious business.

Paul was always careful not to use his calling and ministry as a means of making money. In fact, he even refused support from the Corinthian church so that no one could accuse him of greed (1 Cor. 9:15–19). He never used his preaching as “a cloak of covetousness” (1 Thess. 2:5). What a tragedy it is today to see the religious racketeers who prey on gullible people, promising them help while taking away their money.

To warn Timothy—and us—about the dangers of covetousness, Paul shared four facts:

Wealth does not bring contentment (v. 6). The word *contentment* means “an inner sufficiency that keeps us at peace in spite of outward circumstances.” Paul used this same word later. “For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content” (Phil. 4:11). True contentment comes from godliness in the heart, not wealth in the hand. A person who depends on material things for peace and assurance will never be satisfied, for material things have a way of losing their appeal. It is the wealthy people, not the poor people, who go to psychiatrists and who are more apt to try to commit suicide.

Wealth is not lasting (v. 7). I like to translate this verse, “We brought nothing into this world because we can carry nothing out” (see Job 1:21). When someone’s spirit leaves his body at death, it can take nothing with it because, when that person came into the world at birth, he brought nothing with him. Whatever wealth we amass goes to the government, our heirs, and perhaps charity and the church. We always know the answer to the question “How much did he leave?” Everything!

Our basic needs are easily met (v. 8). Food and “covering” (clothing and shelter) are basic needs; if we lose them, we lose the ability to secure other things. A miser without food would starve to death counting his money. I am reminded of the simple-living Quaker who was watching his new neighbor move in, with all of the furnishings and expensive “toys” that “successful people” collect. The Quaker finally went over to his new neighbor and said, “Neighbor, if ever thou dost need anything, come to see me, and I will tell thee how to get along without it.” Henry David Thoreau, the naturalist of the 1800s, reminded us that a man is wealthy in proportion to the number of things he can afford to do without.

The economic and energy crises that the world faces will probably be used by God to encourage people to simplify their lives. Too many of us know the “price of everything and the value of

nothing.” We are so glutted with luxuries that we have forgotten how to enjoy our necessities.

The desire for wealth leads to sin (vv. 9–10). “They that will be rich,” is the accurate translation. It describes a person who has to have more and more material things in order to be happy and feel successful. But riches are a trap; they lead to bondage, not freedom. Instead of giving satisfaction, riches create additional lusts (desires), and these must be satisfied. Instead of providing help and health, an excess of material things hurts and wounds. The result Paul described very vividly: “Harmful desires ... plunge men into ruin and destruction” (1 Tim. 6:9 NIV). It is the picture of a man drowning! He trusted his wealth and “sailed along,” but the storm came and he sank.

It is a dangerous thing to use religion as a cover-up for acquiring wealth. God’s laborer is certainly worthy of his hire (1 Tim. 5:17–18), but his motive for laboring must not be money. That would make him a “hireling,” and not a true shepherd (John 10:11–14). We should not ask, “How much will I get?” but rather “How much can I give?”

### **3. The Pastor Himself (6:11–16, 20–21)**

While caring for the needs of his people, Timothy needed to care for himself as well. “Take heed unto thyself” (1 Tim. 4:16) was one of Paul’s admonitions. The phrase “But thou” (1 Tim. 6:11) indicates a contrast between Timothy and the false teachers. They were men of the world, but he was a “man of God.” This special designation was also given to Moses (Deut. 33:1), Samuel (1 Sam. 9:6), Elijah (1 Kings 17:18), and David (Neh. 12:24), so Timothy was in good company.

Paul gave four admonitions to Timothy that, if obeyed, would assure him success in his ministry and a continued testimony as “a man of God.”

Flee (v. 11a). There are times when running away is a mark of cowardice. “Should such a man as I flee?” asked Nehemiah (Neh. 6:11). But there are other times when fleeing is a mark of wisdom and a means of victory. Joseph fled when he was tempted by his master’s wife (Gen. 39:12), and David fled when King Saul tried to kill him (1 Sam. 19:10). The word flee that Paul used here did not refer to literal running, but to Timothy’s separating himself from the sins of the false teachers. This echoes the admonition in 1 Timothy 6:5: “From such withdraw thyself.”

Not all unity is good, and not all division is bad. There are times when a servant of God should take a stand against false doctrine and godless practices, and separate himself from them. He must be sure, however, that he acts on the basis of biblical conviction and not because of a personal prejudice or a carnal party spirit.

Follow (v. 11b). Separation without positive growth becomes isolation. We must cultivate these graces of the Spirit in our lives, or else we will be known only for what we oppose rather than for what we propose. “Righteousness” means “personal integrity.”

“Godliness” means “practical piety.” The first has to do with character; the second, with conduct.

“Faith” might better be translated “faithfulness.” It has well been said that the greatest ability is dependability.

“Love” is the agape love that sacrifices for the sake of others. It seeks to give, not to gain.

“Patience” carries the idea of “endurance,” sticking to it when the going is tough. It is not a complacency that waits, but a courage that continues in hard places.

“Meekness” is not weakness, but instead is “power under control.” Courageous endurance without meekness could make a person a tyrant. Perhaps “gentleness” expresses the meaning best.

Fight (vv. 12–16). The verb means “keep on fighting!” It is a word from which we get our English word agonize, and it applies both to athletes and to soldiers. It described a person straining and giving his best to win the prize or win the battle. Near the end of his own life, Paul wrote, “I have fought a good fight” (2 Tim. 4:7).

This “fight,” however, is not between believers; it is between a person of God and the enemy around him. He is fighting to defend the faith, that body of truth deposited with the church (see 1 Tim. 6:20). Like Nehemiah of old, Christians today need to have a trowel in one hand for building and a sword in the other hand for battling (Neh. 4:17). It is sad when some Christians spend so much time fighting the enemy that they have no time to do their work and build the church. On the other hand, if we do not stand guard and oppose the enemy, what we have built could be taken from us.

What is it that encourages us in the battle? We have “eternal life” and need to take hold of it and let it work in our experience. We have been called by God, and this assures us of victory. We have made our public profession of faith in Christ, and others in the church stand with us.

Another encouragement in our battle is the witness of Jesus Christ our Savior. He “witnessed a good confession” (1 Tim. 6:13) before Pontius Pilate and did not relent before the enemy. He knew that God the Father was with Him and watching over Him, and that He would be raised from the dead. It is “God who makes all things alive” (literal translation), who is caring for us, so we need not fear. Timothy’s natural timidity might want to make him shrink from the battle. But all he had to do was remember Jesus Christ and His bold confession, and this would encourage him.

Paul gave Timothy military orders: “I give thee charge” (1 Tim. 6:13, also 1:3). He was to guard the commandment and obey it. Why? Because one day the Commander would appear and he would have to report on his assignment! The only way he could be ready would be to obey orders “without spot or blame” (1 Tim. 6:14 NIV).

The Greek word translated “appearing” (1 Tim. 6:14) gives us our English word epiphany, which means “a glorious manifestation.” In Paul’s day, the word was used in the myths to describe the appearing of a god, especially to deliver someone from trouble. Paul used it of the first coming of Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 1:10) and of His return (2 Tim. 4:1, 8). We do not know when Christ will come again, but it will be “in his own time” (1 Tim. 6:15 NIV), and He knows the schedule. Our task is to be faithful every day and abide in Him (1 John 2:28).

The subject of 1 Timothy 6:16 is God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the only Ruler, though others may take the title. “Potentate” (1 Tim. 6:15) comes from a word that means “power.” The kings and rulers of the earth may think they have power and authority, but God is sovereign over all (see Ps. 2).

“King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1 Tim. 6:15) makes us think of Jesus Christ (Rev. 17:14; 19:16), but here the title is applied to God the Father. Jesus Christ, of course, reveals the Father to us, so He can justly claim this title.

“Immortality” (1 Tim. 6:16) means “not subject to death.” Man is subject to death, but God is not. Only God has immortality as an essential and

inherent part of His being. He is “immortal, invisible, the only wise God” (1 Tim. 1:17). Because God is not subject to death, He is Life and the Giver of life. He is incorruptible and not subject to decay or change. In this life, believers are in mortal bodies, but when Jesus Christ returns, we shall share His immortality (1 Cor. 15:50–58).

Keep in mind that Paul explained all these truths about God in order to encourage Timothy to “fight the good fight of faith” and not give up. We need not fear life because God is the Ruler of all; and we need not fear death because He shares immortality with us.

Timothy lived in the godless city of Ephesus, but God dwells in glorious light. “And the sight of the glory of the LORD was like devouring fire” (Ex. 24:17). “Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment” (Ps. 104:2). John’s description of heaven emphasized the glory of God that gives light to the city (Rev. 21:11, 23–24; 22:5). Of course, light is a symbol of holiness (1 John 1:5–7). God dwells apart from sin, and God is glorious in His holiness.

It is impossible for a sinful human to approach the holy God. It is only through Jesus Christ that we can be accepted into His presence. Jacob saw God in one of His Old Testament appearances on earth (Gen. 32:30), and God allowed Moses to see some of His glory (Ex. 33:18–23). “No man hath seen God at any time” (John 1:18) refers to seeing God in His essence, His spiritual nature. We can only see manifestations of this essence, as in the person of Jesus Christ.

Why did Paul write so much about the person and glory of God? Probably as a warning against the “emperor cult” that existed in the Roman Empire. It was customary to acknowledge regularly, “Caesar is Lord!” Of course, Christians would say “Jesus Christ is Lord!” Only God has “honor and power everlasting” (1 Tim. 6:16b). If Timothy was going to fight the good fight of faith, he had to decide that Jesus Christ alone was worthy of worship and complete devotion.

Be faithful (vv. 20–21). God had committed the truth to Paul (1 Tim. 1:11), and Paul had committed it to Timothy. It was Timothy’s responsibility to guard the deposit and then pass it along to others who would, in turn, continue to pass it on (2 Tim. 2:2). This is God’s way of protecting the truth and spreading it around the world. We are stewards of the doctrines of the faith, and God expects us to be faithful in sharing His good news.

The word science (1 Tim. 6:20) does not refer to the kind of technology we know today by that name. “Knowledge falsely so called” is a better translation. Paul referred here to the teachings of a heretical group called “gnostics” who claimed to have a “special spiritual knowledge.” (The Greek word for “knowledge” is *gnosis*, pronounced NO-sis. An “agnostic” is one who does not know. A gnostic is one who claimed to know a great deal.)

There is no need to go into detail here about the heretical claims of the gnostics. Paul’s letter to the Colossians was written to counteract them. They claimed to have “special spiritual knowledge” from visions and other experiences. They also claimed to find “hidden truths” in the Old Testament Scriptures, especially the genealogies. They considered matter to be evil, and they taught that a series of “emanations” connected God with man. Jesus Christ, they said, was only the greatest of these emanations.

The gnostics actually had a doctrine that was a strange mixture of Christianity, Eastern mysticism, Greek philosophy, and Jewish legalism. Like many of the Eastern cults we see today, it offered “something for everybody.” But Paul summarized all that they taught in one devastating phrase: “profane and vain babblings.” Phillips translated it “the godless mixture of contradictory notions.”

Why should Timothy avoid these teachings? Because some who got involved in them “wandered from the faith” (1 Tim. 6:21 NIV). Not only will wrong motives (a desire for money) cause a person to wander from the faith (1 Tim. 6:10), but so will wrong teachings. These lies work their way into a person’s mind and heart gradually, and before he realizes it, he is wandering off the path of truth.

#### **4. The Rich (6:17–19)**

Paul had already written about the danger of the love of money, but he added a special “charge” for Timothy to give to the rich. We may not think that this charge applies to us, but it does. After all, our standard of living today would certainly make us “rich” in the eyes of Timothy’s congregation!

Be humble (v. 17a). If wealth makes a person proud, then he understands neither himself nor his wealth. “But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth” (Deut. 8:18). We are not owners; we are stewards. If we have wealth, it is by the goodness of God and not because of any special merits on our part. The

possessing of material wealth ought to humble a person and cause him to glorify God, not himself.

It possible to be “rich in this world [age]” (1 Tim. 6:17) and be poor in the next. It is also possible to be poor in this world and rich in the next. Jesus talked about both (Luke 16:19–31). But a believer can be rich in this world and also rich in the next if he uses what he has to honor God (Matt. 6:19–34). In fact, a person who is poor in this world can use even his limited means to glorify God, and discover great reward in the next world.

Trust God, not wealth (v. 17b). The rich farmer in our Lord’s parable (Luke 12:13–21) thought that his wealth meant security, when really it was an evidence of insecurity. He was not really trusting God. Riches are uncertain, not only in their value (which changes constantly), but also in their durability. Thieves can steal wealth, investments can drop in value, and the ravages of time can ruin houses and cars. If God gives us wealth, we should trust Him, the Giver, and not the gifts.

Enjoy what God gives you (v. 17c). Yes, the word enjoy is in the Bible! In fact, one of the recurring themes in Ecclesiastes is “Enjoy the blessings of life now, because life will end one day” (Eccl. 2:24; 3:12–15, 22; 5:18–20; 9:7–10; 11:9–10). This is not sinful “hedonism,” living for the pleasures of life. It is simply enjoying all that God gives us for His glory.

Employ what God gives you (vv. 18–19). We should use our wealth to do good to others; we should share; we should put our money to work. When we do, we enrich ourselves spiritually, and we make investments for the future (see Luke 16:1–13). “That they may lay hold on eternal life” (1 Tim. 6:19) does not suggest that these people are not saved. “That they may lay hold on the life that is real” would express it perfectly. Riches can lure a person into a make-believe world of shallow pleasure. But riches plus God’s will can introduce a person to life that is real and ministry that is lasting.

Paul’s final sentence was not for Timothy alone, because the pronoun is plural: “Grace be with all of you.” Paul had the entire church in mind when he wrote this letter, and certainly all of the elders, not just Timothy. As leader of the church, Timothy needed to heed the word of the apostle, but all of his church members had a responsibility to hear and obey as well.

And so do we today.

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