

# Truth for Today

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

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## Paul's First Letter to Timothy: 1 Timothy 6:1-21

It has always struck me that the Lord Jesus spent the greater part of His life working in obscurity as a tradesman. During this period we are told He grew in favour with God and man (Luke 2:52). Part of His preparation for public ministry was submitting Himself to the rigours of working life. Mark calls Him "the carpenter" (Mark 6:3). He is also called the "carpenter's son" (Matthew 13:55). Not only did the Lord Jesus work with His hands but He knew what it was like to work for someone else. Indeed, the whole of His life on earth was lived out in obedience to His Father. He said, "I ever do those things which please the Father" (John 8:29).

In the opening verses of 1 Timothy 6, Paul takes up the important themes of working relationships, materialism and faithfulness. Many people view work simply as a means of making a living. Often work is only viewed as something which is a personal matter and the complex relationships it involves are overlooked. Just as we cannot choose our relatives when we marry, we can rarely choose the people we work with or, more importantly, the people we work for. In New Testament times slaves could not choose their masters.

### Working relationships

Against such a background Paul introduces a principle of work for the Christian. It is a principle you will not find in any industrial relations legislation. It is a simple principle - we work for the Lord. It was very important to the Christian testimony that Christian masters and Christian servants lived out their faith in Christ. The danger on the one hand was that Christian masters would treat their servants unjustly and with no respect. The other danger, which Paul addresses here, was that Christian servants, who now knew liberty in Christ, might show disrespect towards their masters and bring the Gospel into disrepute. Normally servants and masters had no social contact with each other. But as Christians they would meet together as "one in Christ Jesus" (see Galatians 3:28). Also, it was quite possible some servants were gifted evangelists and teachers. However, this Christian liberty was not to be used to breed disrespect or to take advantage. Honour was to be given where honour was due. Paul teaches how work, and the relationships it involves us in, are frameworks within which Christians can be an outstanding witness to Jesus Christ. This teaching is very relevant today.

1 Timothy 6:1-2 show us that the true Christian regards everyday work as a service to Christ. Work has always been approached in different ways. Some people are lazy, others hard working. Some complain endlessly, others love to work. Some are only motivated by money, others by vocation. Some scheme to climb the career ladder in any way they can, others are responsible and considerate. But Paul encourages Christians to undertake their work in a sense of serving the Lord and understanding, that the way we work is a testimony to others of the grace of God in our lives. On another occasion, Paul reminds us that we serve the Lord and that one day we shall give an account to Him of our service (see Romans 14:12). In Colossians 3:23, we are told, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men." This verse should transform our view of everyday work because not only does it mean we are working for the Lord but that the work itself is valued by the Lord. The Gospels remind us that the Lord Jesus values even a cup of water given to one in need (Matthew 10:42, Mark 9:41). We are also rewarded for our service, unlike the unpaid slave who had no real possessions because everything belonged to his master. The Christian has the certainty of "knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance" (Colossians 3:24).

Paul was very concerned that this teaching about the Christian and work was upheld. He turns to the very highest authority, the teaching of the Lord Jesus, as our guide for a life of godliness.

Godliness is another theme of 1 Timothy 6 and is mentioned in 1 Timothy 6:3, as the outcome of the Lord's teaching in 1 Timothy 6:6; along with contentment, as a great gain; and, finally, in 1 Timothy 6:11, the relation to the man of God. Paul warns that to resist this godly path and take instead a pathway of "envy, quarrelling, malicious talk, evil suspicions, and constant friction" (see 1 Timothy 6:4-5) was folly. It was the work of the flesh rather than the fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:16-26). Paul also identifies the reasons why some were being disruptive. They were trying to gain a position of authority amongst the people of God for financial gain. This is a very telling comment. In 1 Timothy 3, those chosen as bishops and elders were "not [to be] greedy for money" (1 Timothy 3:3,8). In the Old Testament Balaam is the outstanding example of one who prophesied for money (see Numbers 22:7). Jude 11 calls

this the "error of Balaam". In Acts 8:9-25, Simon the sorcerer tried to buy the gift of the Spirit with money and Peter judged him. "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!" (Acts 8:20) Down through the ages, corrupt men have used their gift and position for financial gain. This contrasts sharply with the poverty the Lord Jesus and His disciples knew. It is a great sadness when Christians fall into the trap of materialism because it undermines their relationship with God. The Lord Jesus states very clearly, "You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24). We should have nothing to do with such a way of life or those who live by such principles.

### **Materialism**

Paul had learned "in whatever state I am, to be content" Philippians 4:11. In our chapter today, he explains "godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Timothy 6:6). Godliness does not give financial gain but when combined with an inner sense of the great sufficiency of God, which does not depend on material circumstances, it is a great spiritual gain. Paul strikes at the very heart of materialism in 1 Timothy 6:7. "We brought nothing into the world and we take nothing out of it." When the great Pharaohs of Egypt and the Chinese Emperors died they were buried with vast treasures to take into the afterlife. All that happened was that future generations discovered these riches and today they are exhibited all over the world. These kings went alone into eternity and not one item of material wealth went with them.

Today we are confronted by a slightly different danger - the belief that the material world is everything and that we should enjoy as much of it as possible because death is the end. The Lord addressed this philosophy when He told story of the rich landowner who planned to build greater barns to store his wealth and then he would take his ease and eat, drink and be merry (Luke 12:13-21). God spoke to him, "You fool, tonight your soul shall be required of you" (Luke 12:20). An eternal soul lost for temporary riches! It is challenging that this thinking still influences our society and so few realise the spiritual danger they are in. The Christian Gospel brings home that danger and its remedy in Christ's work of salvation.

Paul goes on to speak about the temptations and harmful lusts the chase for riches can bring. And he gives us one of the most misquoted verses in the Bible. "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil", 1 Timothy 6:10). The old popular song, "Money is the root of all evil" (Whitney and Kramer) got it wrong. Paul never wrote "money is the root of all evil"! Money is inanimate and can be used wisely and to great good. But when it is loved and becomes an obsession, it can cause untold harm.

Charles Dickens' story, "*A Christmas Carol*", vividly demonstrated how the greed of Scrooge damaged his own life and that of others. The change which took place in his life showed how a generous spirit could use wealth for the benefit of others. The Scriptures remind us that God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7). Giving is at the very heart of Christianity. We serve a God who gave everything for our salvation and who expects His children to be marked by the willingness to give all that they have and are in Christ's service.

### **Paul's appeal to Timothy**

In contrast to the dangers of materialism that others had fallen into, Paul appeals personally to Timothy. His affection for his young friend is apparent in the expression "... O man of God ..." (1 Timothy 6:11). At the end of the letter he appeals again in a similar way, "O Timothy! ..." (1 Timothy 6:20). You can sense the heartfelt way in which the old Apostle stresses upon Timothy the need to continue in the Christian pathway. Timothy had to flee the dangers Paul had outlined (1 Timothy 6:3-10). It's never a bad thing to run away. Joseph's only escape from the advances of Potiphar's wife was to run (see Genesis 39:1-23). But it is good to know the direction you are running in! In a recent road race a cyclist, who was leading the field, was misdirected and lost the race. Paul doesn't just tell Timothy to flee (1 Timothy 6:3-10) but what to pursue (1 Timothy 6:11). He concentrates on the positive aspect of the Christian life, "righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness" (1 Timothy 6:11). Again we have a reminder of the fruit of the Spirit in the life of the believer.

In Galatians 5:22-23 the emphasis is on the Spirit's fruitfulness in our lives. Here our responsibility to seek these things is highlighted (1 Timothy 6:11). It would be helpful to look at each of these aspects in turn.

**Righteousness** is placed first. In a corrupt world this is important. We have a righteousness which is in Christ and we are also to live righteous lives. Paul was constantly reminding his readers to live up to their faith - to walk worthy of Christ.

**Godliness** means to be like God. "Be imitators of God as dearly loved children", Paul writes in Ephesians 5:1. We have three granddaughters and relatives and friends are always seeing a likeness between the girls and their parents. Do people see a likeness to Christ in us?

**Faith** is the energy for the Christian life. "Above all taking the shield of faith..." (Ephesians 6:16). That is a daily implicit trust in God, committing all into His hands and seeking to walk by His direction.

**Love** is central to the Christian life. That is perhaps why it is at the centre of this list. Our love to God and each other and to our fellow man. Christ's love is to be seen in our behaviour.

**Patience**, or endurance, is a necessary characteristic of the Christian. It has been described as "steadfastness under adversity". In 2 Timothy 2:3, Paul instructs Timothy to "endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ". We need the ability to be able to withstand difficulty and not to give up when the going gets tough.

If endurance relates to our attitude to circumstances then gentleness describes our behaviour towards people. The world is becoming a harsher place. Gentleness was a feature of Christ. He describes Himself in Matthew 11:29 as "gentle and lowly in heart" and He encourages us to learn from Him.

### **A fight**

Paul then reminds Timothy that he was also to fight (1 Timothy 6:12). This was not a passive race but a battle in which Timothy must constantly strive to move forward and not to slide backwards. He was to do all in his power to further the faith and to do this in the certainty of possessing eternal life. "Laying hold of eternal life" (1 Timothy 6:12) does not have the sense of doing something to attain it but rather possessing something that we already have. The Christian possesses eternal life. This is a quality of life, not simply something which lasts forever. It is God's life. We are to live in the good of it and have the assurance that no power exists which can separate us from the Lord Jesus or from God the Father. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand" (John 10:27-29).

Timothy had a genuine faith which he had been led to through his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois (2 Timothy 1:5). He had also confessed Christ faithfully throughout his young life. Paul urged him to continue in this pathway and to keep the commandment Paul was giving to Timothy. This probably refers to the whole body of teaching in the epistle and is summed up in 1 Timothy 6:11-12. The confession of Christ that Timothy had made was to continue to the end of his life. Paul gives Timothy the example of the Lord Jesus (1 Timothy 6:13) who had witnessed to the very end of His life on earth in the time when Pilate was governor at Jerusalem (see John 18:36-37). This verse gives no special position to Pilate other than fixing the time of Christ's death on earth.

### **A relay race**

Timothy was about to take on greater responsibility in view of Paul's impending martyrdom. In a relay race there is a defined distance in which the baton must be handed over. There have been many embarrassing occasions when some of the world's greatest athletes have dropped the baton. The secret to the race is a smooth change over. The runner taking the baton never stops looking forward whilst his partner ensures the baton is placed in his hand. Great relay runners lose little speed in this changeover. In 1 Timothy 6 we see one of the great changeovers in Christianity. Down through the history of Christianity, the baton of faith has been passed on. Sometimes the next generation failed take on the responsibility of true Christian testimony, at other times they have risen to this challenge. Paul saw the need to prepare the next generation to serve Christ and Timothy took up this challenge.

As Paul encourages Timothy in this, he introduces the thought of Christ's return (1 Timothy 6:14-15). This was a powerful vision. In Hebrews 12:1-2, Paul encourages us to "run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith...". The thought is to run as Jesus did. He is our great example for the life of faith. In 1 Timothy 6:14, the idea is to continue the fight of faith to the end, having Christ's appearing in view. Stephen, the very first martyr, gives us a sense of this when, at the end of his life, his service on earth, now finished, he sees Jesus in all His heavenly glory (see Acts 7:55-56).

### **Christ's greatness**

After writing of Christ's appearing, Paul then takes up the theme of Christ's greatness. Christ's coming is certain. This time He will not come as a lowly Nazarene (see Matthew 2:23) but as Sovereign - the King of kings and Lord of lords, a title we also find in Revelation 19:16. Christ is also presented as the One who is God - eternal, in light, beyond full knowledge and worthy of our worship. Paul sets before us Christ's coming again, Christ crowned as King of kings and Lord of lords and Christ's character as God.

Paul presents Christ in all His greatness and then compares trusting in uncertain riches with trusting in the living God who gives richly (1 Timothy 6:17). Materialism is about accumulating and keeping. Christianity is about giving in abundance. "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

Having earlier explained the temporary nature of materialism, Paul then highlights another aspect of material wealth - its uncertainty. Materialism is not only limited to time but its possession is uncertain. Wealth can come and go. Think of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) who, having being so confident that his early inheritance would fulfil all his dreams, ends up with nothing (Luke 15:12-14). Recent plunges in the stock market value of the new dot com businesses demonstrate the uncertainty which besets the financial world. Nevertheless, Paul encourages those who have wealth to use it wisely by doing good and supporting those in need (1 Timothy 6:18). In other words, to convert something which is of temporary value into something which is of an eternal value. This is a very important spiritual insight.

We are not to use our material possessions in a selfish way, but in ways which benefit other's needs and to draw people to Christ. In the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30, the Lord gave a different number of talents to different servants and each had the responsibility to trade. In the same way, He has given us different abilities, intelligence and material possessions. He is looking for us to use them in such a way that will bring glory to His name. 1 Timothy 6:18 encourages us to do good and not to limit ourselves to one good deed for the day but to be rich in good works. In Titus 2:14, Paul writes about God's special people as being "zealous for good works" or "eager to do what is good". He adds in this verse a readiness to give and a willingness to share. The stock market has a saying, "Speculate to accumulate". Here the Apostle invites us to invest in God's stock market. We invest by giving freely and willingly in doing good. Such stock never crashes, never goes down in value and has an eternal return.

In 1 Timothy 6:20-21 Timothy is asked to keep that which was committed to his trust. This was the body of Christian truth revealed to the Apostles by the Holy Spirit. This "baton" of truth had been passed over by Paul who had nearly finished his race of faith. Timothy now has the responsibility to continue the work the Apostle had begun. In one relay race, I saw the runners had successfully handed over the baton. The runner with the baton was in the lead and then disaster struck - he dropped the baton and was disqualified. Paul was saying to Timothy, "Don't drop the baton. Don't be side-tracked into endless and futile religious or scientific debate. You know the truth. Preach it, live up to it and stay the course even if others fail to do so." Finally, Paul prayed for the grace Timothy would need to do this.

### **Faithfulness**

You feel the deep sense Paul had of Christianity being under attack and the great need there was for faithful Christian testimony. Jude exhorts us in Jude 3 to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to the saints". The true Christian faith will always be challenged and the people of God will always be a target of Satan's effort to undermine the work of God. Paul had remained focused and he encouraged Timothy, and through him ourselves in our day, to be faithful witnesses to Jesus Christ. We are not to be tricked by the great myth of our day that happiness lies in materialism. Nor are we to be diverted in endless religious debate. We are to live for Christ and stand for the faith which was once delivered to the saints. We have to do this in our own generation with the prospect of Christ's return before us and His commendation. "Well done, good and faithful servant .... Enter into the joy of your Lord" (see Matthew 25:21).

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