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# Flee the Love of Money

## 1 Timothy 6

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#### Introduction

We have all been deceived by the magician's slight of hand. On stage, with their lovely assistant to help distract us, they conjure up rabbits or birds from thin air. They make elephants, airplanes, and the statue of liberty disappear before our very eyes. Illusions. Only illusions.

The bible says that wealth is an illusion (Proverbs 23.4-5). Should we "set our eyes on that which is not?" overwork ourselves in pursuit of an illusion? Our pursuit of material things obtained by a pursuit or love of money is just another form of idolatry; where we worship something other than the true and living God; serving some master other than God. We focus and fixate on them, attach our heart to them and they end up controlling and ruling our lives. [**Getting to the Heart of Your Worry**, by Robert D. Jones, *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Vol. 17 No. 3 Spring 1999 p. 22]. Surely we should not pursue such foolishness but seek the wisdom of God and what glorifies Him.

The Bible certainly has a lot to say about what we should be pursuing and in particular the pursuit of money and possessions. Warnings are given to all about the dangers of possessions, wealth, and money. J. Harris Langford writes:

"...God is, in fact, very concerned about the proper use of wealth and possessions. The New Testament records forty days in the life of Christ. In that time frame Jesus spoke about money thirty-nine times. Of the twenty-nine parables that He told, thirteen concerned the right use of possessions. Roughly one out of every six verses in the New Testament deals with our relationship to material things. While on earth Jesus had more to say about money than He did about heaven, hell, prayer, or His Father's Word. Obviously he considered it important." [GOD'S MAN-A PATTERN FOR LIFE, Rev. J. Harris Langford]

It is clear from the wealth of time spent on the subject that we need to heed the warnings and establish a biblical view of money and possessions.

## What Is True Wealth?

<turn to 1 Timothy 6>Our text tonight grows out of Paul's words to Timothy, in 1 Timothy 6.3-5, about certain false teachers; men who were espousing a different doctrine, men who were destitute of the truth, and who practiced and held a view that godliness was useful as a means of gain. It introduces this very practical section on the Christian view of wealth.

Beginning with Verse 6, Paul plunges right into the heart of the matter by showing us what true wealth is.

Now 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 clothing, with these we shall be content. [1 Timothy 6.6-8 NKJV]

Twice in that passage the apostle says that contentment is true wealth—not possessions, not new cars or new homes, not a comfortable environment—but contentment; there is where true wealth lies. It is clear in this passage that contentment comes from a whole and balanced life. That is echoed many times in this letter that is what godliness means—goodness, balance, and wholeness. That wholeness produces a contented heart.

There is a twisted and distorted view of Christianity frequently heard today—especially on religious television, a prosperity gospel—that says that, when you become a Christian, God goes to work for you to make you wealthy, and if you are not rich as a Christian there is something wrong with your faith. If you are not driving a Cadillac, a Porsche, or a Mercedes, obviously you are a weak-faithed individual, because (according to that view of Christianity), God blesses Christians, and wealth is the sign of blessing. People who think like this might quote Proverbs 3:5 this way: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall bring you good luck.” That worldly view is clearly denounced in this passage; to hold it is to adopt the very view that Paul says the false teachers were advocating, i.e. that godliness is a means of gain.

The truth is, as Paul goes on to say, that wholeness, balanced realism, richness of soul and spirit—godliness—is in itself gain. That is the true wealth; it brings contented hearts, which is what we are all looking for. One of the great problems of this time in history, with its crass materialism and its blatant hedonism (or the pursuit of pleasure), is that we are a discontent people. We are always looking for something to fill the void of an empty life.

Some people think that contentment means getting everything they want as soon as they want it. Most of us know that that is not true.

We have lived long enough to know that those who live that way are not content at all. One definition of contentment that I have heard is “not having all you want but wanting only what you have.” Satisfied with what you have—that is being content. The Greek word used here in this passage means self-sufficiency, having all you need and wanting only that much, not craving for more.

“It does not mean that we are self-sufficient in our own power, but rather that we are self-sufficient in God’s provision. It implies that God is our source and resource. We need nothing outside of Him. What a state of grace! To be secure in Him alone. To be content in Him alone. To be satisfied in Him alone. To have that attitude is to be impervious to outside pressures and temptations. The allure of the world cannot penetrate the armor of contentment. If you are contented with a thing, you are not tempted to change. If we are content with God, then we will be satisfied and secure.” [Contentment, msg. by J. David Hoke delivered on July 10, 1994]

The Apostle Paul defines contentment in Philippians 4: “Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content.” [Philippians 4.11 NKJV]. Then Paul goes on, “I know how to be abased [to live without anything] and I know how to abound [to have all I need] ... I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.” [cf. Philippians 4.12 NKJV]. The next verse is the key: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” [Philippians 4.13 NKJV].

“The contented person, like Paul, knows that he has everything that he needs, and more than he deserves. In whatever circumstances he finds himself, he learns to praise God for the provision He has given. Christ is his strength. Christ is his provision. The contented person is secure in his Lord.” [Contentment, msg. by J. David Hoke delivered on July 10, 1994]

Godliness, in other words, is contentment. True godliness understands that when you have God, and food, and clothing, that is all you really need to be enriched and fulfilled, satisfied and content. That is the clear teaching of the Scriptures. So the first thing this passage teaches us is that things do not make us happy. Jesus said that: “...one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” [cf. Luke 12.15 NKJV] True wealth can be found by possessing Him and being content in Christ.

## Why We Should Not Aspire To Be Rich

### Nothing In – Nothing Out

Paul goes on to prove the truth of these words by reminding us how we came into the world and then reminds us that we have an appointment with death. He says “we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.” What do you have when you are born? Nothing. We enter into the world broke, completely dependent on the benevolence of our parents. You do not have anything; even your diaper has to be furnished. In our lives we accumulate lots of stuff, make some money, and have a family. But what do you have when you leave this world? Nothing. You leave it all behind, as the saying goes “there are no U-Hauls behind hearses.”

“Suppose someone passes empty-handed through the turnstiles at a big city art museum and begins to take the pictures off the wall and carry them importantly under his arm. You come up to him and say, “What are you doing?” He answers, “I’m becoming an art collector.” “But they’re not really yours,” you say, “and besides they won’t let you out with those. You’ll have to go out just like you came in.” But he answers again, “Sure they’re mine. I’ve got them under my arm. People look at me as an important dealer in the halls. And I don’t bother myself with thoughts about leaving. Don’t be a kill joy.” We would call this man a fool— out of touch with reality. So is the person who exerts himself to get rich in this life. We will go out just the way we came in.” [unknown]

### Be Content With The Necessities Of Life

The apostle says all we need is food and clothing—provision for the maintenance of life (food), and protection from the elements that would destroy life (shelter and clothing). God provides those for us, and with that simple lifestyle man can be content. This is what Jesus meant when he said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” [Matthew 4.4 NKJV]. It is the knowledge of God that gives contentment; it is fellowship with the Creator and Owner of all things that makes our heart rejoice, giving us peace and hope and security. That is the true contentment, Paul says.

But lets be realistic about this: It is extremely difficult to live at that basic, fundamental lifestyle. Why? primarily, because we are bombarded endlessly with powerful appeals to buy this, send for that, borrow from the future to live in the present; to believe that we all deserve much better than we are getting. All these subtle encourage-

ments are pressed upon us hour-by-hour, day-by-day, in every magazine and newspaper, on every radio and television program, in every store window. Nothing is more universal than the propaganda to possess more things. Christians are up against a tough assignment when they are called, not to make that their objective in life. The whole world has made that their objective. If we do not watch, and keep alert, we will succumb to this pressure without even knowing it.

## How We Fall Into The Trap

### A Plunge

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. [1 Timothy 6.9 NKJV]

Here, Paul is telling us how, in every age, this subtle danger lays hold of our hearts: First, it comes in the form of simple temptation. Suppose your weakness is automobiles. Open a magazine and there is a picture, in living beautiful color, of a gorgeous automobile. It makes you drool to look at it. Walk into the Dayton Mall, and it is sitting in the middle of the mall. You can go up and rub it, feel it, drool over it. Your neighbors have one sitting in their driveway. Every Sunday morning they are out worshipping it, bowing down to it, lifting up its hood, feeding it all kinds of expensive things.

That is temptation, and that is what we are up against. It creates in us a hunger to have one like it. We all feel the force and power of this. It looks so natural, especially when we are constantly being told that we deserve this, to drive a Mercedes; we are this kind of people because it would fit or enhance our image. It is amazing how easily we can convince ourselves that we, like everybody else, have a right to have these things. That is temptation.

But that is not the worst. There is another stage. Paul says that those who want to be rich “fall into a snare.” Notice where the emphasis is: It is on the desire to be rich; it is the love of money. But money is a very necessary commodity in life; it is impossible to get along without using money in one form or another. It is “the love of money” that the Scripture is talking about, the desire to have more and more and more of it, the craving for riches, the constant planning of how to get another buck.

Paul says that when you fall into temptation, and give way to this lust for more things, you create a snare for yourself. You want more and more. The Bible says, “He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; Nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity” [Ecclesiastes 5.10]. You could be the wealthiest person on the face

of the earth and still not be content. We could point to many examples to show that wealth, prosperity and material things do not satisfy; they only create a desire in us for more. Just take a look at the elite in Hollywood. They seem to have it all, yet there is emptiness deep down inside of them that they are still trying to fill. There is a hunger they cannot satisfy, and a thirst they cannot quench.

Your possessions will soon begin to possess you. Everyone who has had any success in obtaining some of the things they desired soon discovers this. I am sure many of you could bear testimony to this. As soon as you get a shiny new car, an expensive gadget, and a new home with all its comfort, etc., it immediately introduces a whole new range of worries. You have to get insurance on it, you have to buy locks to make sure that it is not taken away from you, you must be available many times when you would rather be away, because your possessions demand that you take care of them.

Possessions also change your relationship with others. You find that people are treating you differently because you have something that is a symbol of prestige or status. People no longer treat you for who you are; they are treating you for what you have, so you begin to get suspicious of your friends and your friendships. You can even get involved in court cases, lawsuits, etc. All this enters when the love of money starts to possess you. That is the snare involved.

Second, the apostle says, such people fall into “foolish and harmful lusts”; damaging things happen to them and to those they love. The love of money encourages cruelty, callousness, neglect and shameful indulgence. People get involved in things they never dreamed they would do, all in the name of power, or greed, or pleasure. We lie in a sales pitch to gain advantage over our competitor, we cheat on our tax returns, we gamble away our house payment, we outright steal, and commit murder, and the list could go on and on. “...foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.” Leading to eternal damnation the apostle says. A very serious sin.

## A Passion

The temptation, when not squelched, produces a desire that can't be easily controlled. Paul likens it to a root that grows stronger and goes deeper into our hearts and souls. That is just the way our text describes it.

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. [1 Timothy 6.10 NKJV]

The first thing that we see is the love of money takes root. When you are living to be rich, breathing it every day, working at it as your great

objective, that, Paul says, is a deep root of evil developing in your life. We all know what a root is. If you find a big, luxuriant weed growing in your back yard and you cut it down, although it looks like you have gotten rid of the weed you have not because the root is still there. After a while the root will send forth another shoot, and if you are not right on top of the situation, soon there will be another weed the same size or bigger than the first one. That is what the love of money is like, the apostle is saying. You can eliminate some of the problems that it creates but there will be another one along very shortly, because the root is still there, constantly producing evil in your life, creating situations that are disastrous to you and to others.

## A Parting

The second thing the love of money causes, the apostle says, is to stray or drift away from the faith. Most of us have probably known and seen young men and women who, when they first started out, were eager young Christians, committed to understanding the Word of God, dedicated to the Lord. But then they went away to school or they got involved in some prestigious training program and ended up with a well-paying job, and turned away from the faith. They lost the center of life, the very purpose of living, forgetting the God who is behind all things. The love of money drives us away from the faith.

## A Price

The final result is that such people have “pierced themselves through with many sorrows,” Paul says. Some of the Hollywood idols have confessed what was going on privately in their lives when the public thought they were happy, beautiful people. Elvis Presley was the king of rock and roll. He was idolized by millions, admired and held up as the example of success to follow. We know now that he died a bloated, pitiful shell of a man, unable to live a few moments without shooting himself up with drugs, to fill the void in his life.

There comes a day when a final realization dawns on those who give themselves to the amassing of riches—they finally come to the place where they have to give it all up. They can take nothing away, Paul says. It must be an awful feeling for an individual to awake at last to the realization that his whole life has been lived for nothing! He has to leave everything to others to waste and spend, as they like. He goes before the God of Glory with absolutely nothing to show for living. That is what Scripture faces us with.

## How Can We Resist?

Fleeing the love of money first requires an honest look at oneself. Whether you are rich or poor is not at issue. You may have investments or a retirement plan that requires periodic attention. Or you may be living paycheck to paycheck. The poor can be just as greedy as the wealthy, and a wealthy man or woman may be very generous. Greediness does not afflict one class much more than another, so we must ask ourselves some potentially painful questions. Am I content, right now with food and clothing God has provided (1 Tim 6:8)? Do I have a tendency toward making purchases that I do not need? One evidence of this is how much accumulate in various places. Take a look at your clothing closet, your garage, storage shed, or rental locker. How much of that was purchased with a need in mind and, if so, does that need still exist? Ask yourself these questions. Am I in debt and is paying off those debts a struggle each month? Do I work unnecessary hours, maybe one and a half or two jobs to satisfy my desire for more stuff? Do I pay more attention to the financial news than to the Scriptures? Can I sleep at night? How easy is it to be generous? How cheerful am I when opportunities to give arise? [Dave Wickholm]

## Repentance

The answers to questions like these will give an indication of where our heart is at, because our heart follows our treasure (Luke 12:34). If we must confess that our heart is caught up with the lusts of the eyes and worldly treasures then genuine repentance is required. The Lord Jesus Christ warns that “no servant can serve two masters” and “You cannot serve God and mammon.” James 4 points out that one source of conflict among people, even Christian people, is envy and spending ourselves on our own pleasures. He cries out against such an attitude, “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” (James 4.4) This is essentially the same thing Christ said. We must understand that the love of money really is as bad as the Scriptures tell us. It will plunge us into “*destruction and perdition*”. We will come to hate and despise God if we persist in loving money.

If this describes us then James 4.6-10 gives us direction. We must humble ourselves before God and seek the greater grace that He gives. According to James, it is quite appropriate to weep and mourn over this sin. It is no small thing to make an idol out of wealth and dethrone God from His rightful place at the center of our lives. James indicates that the devil is often behind this evil passion as he is behind any idol. This is a tough neighborhood and we should not be living



here. This is not theatrical exaggeration by the apostle. He is deadly serious!

He exhorts us to cleanse our hands and purify our hearts. Real repentance may require some careful thought and perhaps some counsel. What is in my hands that I need to drop? What has contaminated my heart and made it impure? How can they be made clean again? These questions require prayerful consideration if we are to be obedient in these matters. There is good news for those who take James and God seriously. God promises two things in this passage. First, that He will draw near us if we draw near to Him. I believe that this is a promise of practical guidance in areas in which we genuinely desire repentance and restoration. If the angels in heaven rejoice over one sinner's repentance, surely such a change delights the heart of God as well. He will draw near to such people. Secondly, He promises to exalt those who humble themselves. This is a general principal in Scripture, but James applies it specifically to repentance. God jealously desires the spirit that He has made to dwell within us. A broken and contrite heart He will not despise (Psalms 51.17). In fact he pays special attention to those with a broken heart (Isaiah 57.15, 66.2) and promises to revive the hearts of the contrite. He will lift us up into what is truly life and out of this shabby substitute of the real thing. It is part of the greater grace that James says God gives. [Dave Wickholm]

## Know Yourself

Earnest repentance requires that we know our weaknesses in order to avoid them in the future. In some case it will be necessary to "cut it off" (Matthew 5.30). For some of us a credit card is like a drink to an alcoholic. Not everyone needs to cut up his or her plastic, but some of us may, at least for a time. Whatever it is that excites this desire for wealth and possessions must be fled from. Run; don't walk, from whatever causes you to become envious of another. Understand that modern advertising is designed in most cases to create a desire where none exists and to inflame what already exists. If the ads on TV or in other media with their false promises of happiness are troubling and unsettling to your being content, then turn away from them. For some of us this means staying away from eBay, or the malls, or the car and boat dealerships. [Dave Wickholm]

## Pursue That Which Is Truly Valuable

But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. [1 Timothy 6.11 NKJV]

But in addition to running away from danger, we are given ample positive, proactive things to do in striving against materialism. In our

central passage on fleeing from the love of money, Paul tells Timothy more. He says, “*pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.*” Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called.” Pursue the things that are truly of value, things that will last. Pursuit of Christ likeness is part of eternal life. Pursuing godly character is part of taking hold of eternal life. It is part of the good fight of faith. It is said, “nature abhors a vacuum.” We must be filled with something. In fact, this is the only way to overcome any of the vices of this life. For every putting off of the old man, there is a putting on of the new. Considering ourselves dead to sin is always coupled with a presenting of ourselves to God and the members of our bodies to God as instruments of righteousness. For every exhortation to “not be conformed to this world” there is an invitation to “be transformed by the renewing of our minds.” Flight from sin is most effective when we flee toward, or pursue those virtues God commends to us. Study the virtues! Determine with God’s grace to make them yours. [Dave Wickholm]

## Words To The (Wise) Rich

The words in 1 Timothy 6.6-10 are addressed to people who are not rich but who may be tempted to want to be rich. In 6.17-19 Paul addresses a group in the church who are already rich. We would do well to heed these words also.

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. [1 Timothy 6.17-19 NKJV]

If you have money, Paul tells you not to be filled with pride, not to count on your riches to remember that it is “the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.” God is the giver. Many people forget that and believe the lie their own heart tells them, that they are responsible for their own wealth; they earned it; they performed better than other people. But it is God who allows that wealth to come. God is the ultimate giver; and he gives, as this verse says, that we might enjoy riches.

In verse 18 goes on to tell us how to enjoy our riches and what action to take if we are affluent, but this well applies even if we have little money. This is how we can truly enjoy the money God has given us, use your money for good deeds, “do good” and “be rich in good works” and be liberal and generous. Let your money flow freely to further the kingdom of God. Our Lord put it best when he said, “Freely you have received, freely give,” [cf. Matthew 10.8b NKJV].

These are effective means of fleeing the desire to be rich and defeating envy and materialism; take the positive step of becoming a generous and competent giver. Both traits are important because not all needs should be met. There are many reasons to give of one's money or time or other possessions. The basic point to be made though is that God does not need your money or anything of yours or anyone else's for that matter. He is entirely and joyfully self-sufficient. However, you and I need to give if we are to become men and women of God.

Paul tells us that when we do this we will be, "storing up...a good foundation for the time to come." [1 Timothy 6.19a NKJV] What will survive this life and carry over into the next? Not things (we have seen that), but there is one thing that will: It is people. When you change people's lives you are laying up treasures in heaven, and your investments and dividends will be there to meet you. Paul also wants us to "lay hold on eternal life" [1 Timothy 6.19b NKJV] and to not lose it. That is, in the present—using what God has given you in such a way that you are living your life with a heavenly perspective. That will lead to "eternal life," abundant life, a full and satisfying life. There is nothing that can contribute more to that than using money to help people now, to minister to a lost and needy world. We must all live with the realization that some day we must leave everything behind and only that which we have given away will we have in eternity.

## An Attitude of Gratitude

We spent a good deal of time tonight looking at what true wealth is and I want to impress this on you again in closing. We need to be thankful for God's provision; that will create contentment in us. As we have seen contentment comes from seeking God, not things. If we sought God the way we seek after other things many of our problems would disappear. It is our relationship with God that is the source of contentment, and nothing else can take his place.

Listen to how Paul described what his life was like, "We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body" [2 Corinthians 4.8-10]. Paul's life was filled with many difficulties that he could complain about. Yet he did not live life based on the conditions around him. His happiness and joy was not based on situations; it was based on his relationship with Christ. He knew he had all he needed in Him, for it was Christ that gave him the strength for life.

How can you be content? Contentment comes when you learn that this world can never satisfy you, but that satisfaction can be found in

a relationship with God and living for Him. It is that relationship which provides us with meaning and security in this life, and an assurance of eternal life where all our deepest needs will be completely satisfied. The Psalmist, when thinking of heaven, said, “As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness.” [Psalm 17.15]. We can live through adversity or grief here because we are not expecting this world to satisfy us; we are looking to the world that is yet to come.

Having an attitude of gratitude is an act of faith. It means you are unafraid to live a life trusting in God because you have faith in a God who cares for you and provides for you. He is faithful and his promises are true. He never fails. And because you have a relationship with this wonderful God you can have contentment, joy and a desire to pass on what God has blessed you with. To trust is to thank. It creates an attitude of gratitude.

## Concluding

### John Piper on Christian Hedonism

“Money is the currency of Christian Hedonism in the sense that what you do with it—or desire to do with it—can make or break your happiness forever. 1 Timothy 6.6-19 makes very clear that what you do with money can destroy you (v.9) or can secure your eternal life (v. 19). It seems to me that this passage teaches us to use our money in a way that will bring us the greatest and longest gain. Therefore the text advocates what I have been calling Christian Hedonism—the view that it is not only permitted but commanded by God that we pursue our full and lasting pleasure; and that all the evils in the world come not because our desires for happiness are too strong but because they are so weak that we settle for fleeting pleasures that do not satisfy our deepest souls but in the end destroy them. The root of all evil is that we are the kind of people who settle for the love of money instead of the love of God (v.10).” [Money: Currency for Christian Hedonism, msg. by John Piper delivered on October 9, 1983]