

Instructions to the Wealthy [Slide 1] 1 Timothy 6:17-21

We live in one of the wealthiest countries of all time. You may not think of yourself as wealthy, especially if you compare yourself to some of the billionaires of the US, but compared to the rest of the world you are wealthy. If you don't go hungry at night, if you own more than one pair of shoes, if you drive a car, you are wealthy compared to most of the world. So, when Paul tells Timothy to instruct those who are rich in this world, he's talking about you.

Money is not evil. As we learned two weeks ago, the love of money is a root of sorts of evil. But even if you don't love money, wealth brings with it certain temptations that can lure you away from God if you are not careful.

We finish the book of 1 Timothy today with Paul's final instructions to Timothy for those who are rich. I invite you to turn in your Bible to 1 Timothy 6:17-21. 1 Timothy is about three fourths of the way through the New Testament before you reach the big book of Hebrews. 1 Timothy 6:17-21. As I read this passage, notice what advice Paul gives to those who are rich. Read.

We're going to look at four instructions Paul gives Timothy in this passage.

[Slide 2] The first instruction in verse 17 is to fix your hope on God and not on your riches. Paul begins by telling Timothy to instruct those who are rich in this present world. As I have already pointed out, you are rich in this present world. According to the World Factbook the median per capita household income in the world is \$2920. So, if your annual income is significantly higher than \$2900, then compared to most of the people in the world, you are rich. Even our poor in the United States are wealthy compared to most of the world.

What does it mean to fix your hope on your riches? This is a person who finds their security in their bank account or their retirement portfolio or in their material wealth. It is hard to keep trusting in God rather than in the big nest egg you have accumulated. You may think you are trusting in God rather than in your wealth, but the only way to know for sure is to lose your wealth. Richard Stearns tells the following story: Read.

How can you tell if you are trusting in your money or trusting in God? Other than losing your money, one way to tell is what Mr. Stearns discovered. Give a sizable chunk of it away and see how you feel. If you're now fearful because you no longer have that cushion, then you were probably placing your hope in money rather than in God. I think it is no coincidence that Paul talks about generosity after he talks about not placing your hope in your wealth.

A second clue that you are trusting in money is whether you become conceited or proud about what you own. If you're proud of what you own you probably have an up-to-date reckoning of all your assets. People who are proud of what they have, usually have an inventory in their mind that accurately represents their wealth. People who are not proud of their wealth may not be able to answer your question: How much do you own? Proud people want to know what their financial bottom line is. People who don't care how much they own often don't know how much they own.

People who are proud of their wealth find ways to let other people know about the extent of their wealth. The pride usually is fed by comparison. I can be proud about this amount because it is more than most people. Or proud people don't have to discuss their wealth. They can go to government sources of financial information, find out the breakdown of number of people in

each category of wealth, and secretly gloat without anyone knowing. God says in Jeremiah 9:23, “Read.”

So, if you are afraid to lose it or proud of having it, you are probably trusting in your riches rather than in God, so Paul’s instructions here are for you.

Fix your hope on God because of the uncertainty of riches. A series of calamities could quickly make you penniless. A debilitating chronic illness could wipe away all your savings. A lawsuit could make you destitute. An ill-advised investment could backfire. You could be robbed or cheated out of all your wealth. The only sure thing in life is God. All it takes is a momentary mistake at the wheel, a horrendous car crash, with loss of life or someone invalidated for the rest of their life and everything you worked so hard to accumulate could be lost in seconds. Fix your hope on God and not on your riches.

Fix your hope on God because he abundantly supplies us with all things to enjoy. God is generous with us. He wants us to enjoy life and to have fun. You may think that by me warning you not to fix your hope on riches that God wants you to get rid of all of them and live a Spartan life. God has blessed us with an abundance and part of that blessing is for our enjoyment. Sure, God wants us to be generous with others, not to hoard wealth, and to be compassionate to those who do not have as much, but he also blesses us so that we might enjoy life too.

I can’t tell you what the right balance is for you in terms of saving for the future versus hoarding or giving to others versus keeping some to enjoy for yourself and your family. I can’t tell you when your investing has degenerated into trusting money rather than God, but the Holy Spirit can. If you will regularly consult with him about your handling of your money he can help you achieve the right balance for yourself. I’ve given you some general boundaries within which to operate. If you’re boasting about your wealth, you’ve gone out of bounds. If you’re so miserly that you won’t crack your wallet to enjoy life, you’re out of bounds. If you’re terrified of losing your savings, you’re out of bounds. Where you should be within those bounds is something only the Holy Spirit can tell you.

[Slide 3] Paul’s second instruction in verse 18 is: Use your wealth to do good and to share with others. He says, “Do good, be rich in good works, be generous and ready to share.” Use your wealth to bless others. There is a real joy in blessing others.

Being rich opens up possibilities for you to do good to others. When you live in a marginal part of the world and you are poor, almost all your time is spent just on surviving. When you live in a country like the US you have wealth not only in the form of money but also in the form of time, educations, skills you have developed. On average most of us work 40-50 hours a week. That still leaves us with excess time. If you’re retired or not part of a dual income family, you may have even more time. With the educational opportunities we have here you have probably developed some skills and expertise that can assist others. When Paul talks about being generous and ready to share, he is not talking just about handing out cash, although that’s part of it. He’s also talking about how rich people like us can volunteer our time, our skills, our knowledge, and our talents to do good to others.

I don’t want to discourage you about being financially generous, but I have discovered that often what people need more than our money is our time and presence. Issues of the heart and soul are not solved by money. They are solved by relationship. The boys that I mentor at Ogg don’t need my money. They need my time and my presence and my encouragement. They need a man who believes in them and who will share with them things they need to know to succeed in life. They need someone to cheer them in their successes and encourage them in their defeats.

We are to become like Jesus and one of his qualities was generosity. Jesus demonstrated his generosity by leaving Heaven and investing himself in a life here on the Earth, devoted to serving God and proclaiming truth. He gave fully of himself, including his life to meet our need for salvation.

Listen to this story of generosity from Chicken Soup for the Parent's Soul. Read story pp. 20-21 of map book. Use your wealth to do good and to share with others.

[Slide 4] Paul's third instruction in verse 19 is that your generosity will benefit you in the future. You will lay up for yourselves a good foundation for what is coming, that is the life to come. Paul is repeating a promise that Jesus gave in the Sermon on the Mount. Look at your sermon outline where I have printed out Matthew 6:19-20. Read.

You can't take it with you, but you can send it on ahead. Every time you use your wealth to bless others in the name of Jesus you store up in heaven a reward for your generosity. It is how you can invest in your eternity. We don't fully know what Heaven is like, but the Bible teaches that there are levels of reward and differing stewardships based upon our faithfulness here on the Earth. There is no distinction in entering Heaven. We all make it there by God's grace through our faith in Jesus Christ. But once we get there, our levels of recognition and even enjoyment are determined by how faithful we are to God in this life. What we do here does matter. How we live does affect what we experience in Heaven. God does not provide us with a lot of details, but he does assure us that it is so, that we can actually lay up for ourselves treasures in Heaven.

Does that thought govern how you manage and disburse your money? Are you investing in your Heavenly future? Meredith Hodges tells the following story. Read story in Garden book pp 32-33. I think that wake is a picture of what it is going to be like in Heaven when we learn for the first time exactly what kind of impact we had on the Earth as God reveals it to us and everyone else. I want my life to count for something. How about you? Your generosity will benefit you in the future.

[Slide 5] Finally in verses 20-21 Paul tells Timothy to hold to God's truth and to avoid the world's knowledge and arguments. Guard what is entrusted to you. Timothy's not the only one who has been given God's truth. God has also trusted you with his truth. Each of us here is a messenger, an ambassador to this world representing God and his Kingdom. The Bible contains God's message and most people will only hear that message if you proclaim it. Some will pick up a Bible on their own and apart from anyone else, the Holy Spirit will convict them of the truth they read, but for most people the way they will hear the truth is by someone like you or me sharing that truth with them. We have been entrusted with God's truth and we are to guard it so that it remains God's truth and does not become corrupted with human reasoning and worldly ideas.

It is so easy to compromise with the world's way of thinking, to value tolerance when we should value holiness, to elevate worldly gossip and chatter when we should pursue God's truth. I cringe at some of the Facebook posts I see where Christians don't root their comments in the teachings of the Bible, but rather parrot the slogans of those who oppose or contradict God's truth.

The reality is that some will go astray and depart from the truth. They will no longer believe or proclaim what they once held to be true. I think of a certain couple in our church who once served in leadership who departed from the faith and, as far as I know, still have not returned.

The word "guard" implies that vigilance is needed, that thieves or enemies may steal what is valuable away from you and you need to keep alert and keep watch that doesn't happen. Your Enemy desires to steal from you your love for God's truth and your allegiance to it. His aim for

you would be for you to swap out the Bible for the wisdom of this world. He would convince you that what is old is outdated, that truth somehow changes and evolves over time and that what the Christian church has proclaimed for over two thousand years is no longer in fashion.

It is fitting then that Paul ends the letter with the same topic he began it. Hold to God's truth and resist false teaching. In chapter 1 verse 4 he warned Timothy not to pay attention to myths and genealogies which are mere speculation rather than furthering the administration with God. Here he exhorts Timothy to guard what was entrusted to him. In chapter 1, verse 2 Paul pronounced grace, mercy and peace on Timothy. In this last verse he said "Grace be with you."

So, we end 1 Timothy with this final admonition: By God's grace, by his power and divine enablement, hold to God's truth and do not depart from it. Amen.