

DEVELOPING CONTENTMENT

1 Timothy 6

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1 Timothy 6:1–21 (NIV)

“All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God’s name and our teaching may not be slandered. Those who have believing masters are not to show less respect for them because they are brothers. Instead, they are to serve them even better, because those who benefit from their service are believers, and dear to them. These are the things you are to teach and urge on them. If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain. But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep this command without spot or

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blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen. Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life. Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith. Grace be with you.”

Throughout this letter, Paul has been concerned with relationships in the household of God. Relationships which affect men and women, as we saw in chapter 2; and church leaders, like bishops and pastors, deacons and deaconesses, in chapters 3 and 4; widows and elders in chapter 5; now, slaves and masters and those desiring to be rich and those who are rich. The family of God is indeed that—a family.

In the chapter today—“Developing Contentment” in your work, your faith and your financial security or insecurity—we find that Paul is summing up a lot of things that are remaining on his heart to say to Timothy for the benefit of the believers at the city of Ephesus.

I. Christian slaves are to work diligently.

The first thing which is on his heart concerns the relationships of Christian slaves to their non-Christian owners, verse 1, and to their Christian owners, verse 2. It is indeed a striking thing as you read the New Testament to find in the letters of Paul to the Ephesians, the Colossians, and

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also to Timothy, references to Christian slaves. There is no advocacy at this point in the New Testament of slave rebellion.

What is the character of the gospel, and what is the nature of the gospel in its approach to the question of slavery in the first-century world? We have to back off for a moment and recognize that it was estimated that approximately one-third of the population of the Mediterranean world were slaves. That as high as perhaps sixty million people were slaves. We have seen through examples in secular history, like Spartacus, of the futility of the revolt of slaves. To encourage revolt and revolution was to invite only instead a great holocaust on the slaves. Therefore Christianity took three approaches to the question of slavery.

The first approach in regard to the slave himself was to say to the slave, “With Jesus Christ in your heart, you can be free on the inside.” The most important freedom is the freedom within. So the gospel never attempted to develop a class hatred.

A second important message of the gospel for the church was this: There is to be total and complete equality in the household of faith. When, in the household of faith and in the performance of the functions of the church, the slave and the owner meet, they are on equal ground. In Christ there is neither slave nor free. We are one in Christ Jesus. It may be in the outside world the slave had a relationship of servitude to his owner. But it might just as well be in the church that the owner would come in under the teaching and ruling impetus in the household of faith of the slave. In fact, the Christian church in the first century never sought to address itself as a political force in culture. Rather, instead of giving advice to the world, it sought to get its own house in order.

The third approach that the gospel took in regard to the question of slavery is to understand that there are two ways of change. One way is the direct way and the other is the indirect way. The

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direct way for change was impossible in the context of the first century. But the indirect way was not. So there was a trust to the slower permeating power and love of the gospel to change men's hearts. And, indeed, as the few centuries came after the birth of the church, a clear difference began to take place in society regarding slavery because of what happened in the Christian church. The fact that God had abolished the distinctions between slave and owner.

Here, however, Paul in these two verses is dealing with a very practical situation now of the slave and his relationship to his unsaved owner and his saved owner. We might use some other terms. Like the relationship of the employee to his employer. What if you have an unsaved employer? Paul gives the motive for work for an unsaved employer. The motive that you're working for him is not simply that your family can be sustained. The motive for working for him is that you can carry forth your work in such a way that the teaching of Jesus Christ and the name of God may not be defamed. That, by your work, you will so uphold the name and nature of God that your work in itself will be a testimony to how God has changed you and transformed your life. Quite a motive for working!

In relationship to the saved owner—of whom the slave might have a tendency to feel, "He's a brother. I don't have to work for him"—the apostle says the motive there is that as a result of your work those who believe are going to be benefited. And of course "those who believe" not only includes the owner but also includes the slave. All the more motive for doing good work for the Christian boss, because it is members of the household of faith that will be benefited.

For those of you who work with Christian organizations, working for a Christian organization never gives us the prerogative of sloughing off because we're working for a Christian organization and "they don't do things as professionally as the world." All the more incentive to throw oneself into the work and to stand out for the sake of the Lord.

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II. Believers must distinguish true doctrine from false teaching.

Then Paul changes subjects to talk about the matter of false doctrine. In verses 3–5 he speaks of false teaching, and in verses 11–16 he speaks of being content with the proper faith. Being a person of God, a man or woman of God.

False teaching has been a clear concern of the apostle throughout this letter. You run across references to false teaching almost in every chapter of this letter to Timothy. Paul, when he left Ephesus as recorded in Acts 20 and bid goodbye to the leaders of the church, warned them that in the days ahead false teachers would come in to disturb the flock of God. And that they were to take warning of this. Ten years later this letter is coming as kind of a follow-up. Here we are aware as Christians of the fact that there are those who come even within Christian communities to distort the clear teaching which sets us free in our belief and in our behavior. Paul identifies false teaching very simply as a teaching which does not agree with the “sound” words of our Lord.

The word “sound” here is the word literally from which we derive “hygiene.” It speaks of the purifying effect of the Word of the Lord. It’s wholesome what He speaks and clean. If the nature of false teaching is such that it disagrees with the words and teaching of the Lord, the character of a false teaching is several-fold. One is Paul had encountered false teachers who were filled with conceit, claiming that they knew everything. In actual fact, Paul says by a satirical turn of phrase, they know nothing. What actually they have on display is not the Lord Jesus Christ but the display of themselves. Of course, the particular temptation of those who are involved a lot in teaching and have the experience of having people listening to them is to think of themselves after a while as some sort of tin god. A power over people through the medium of teaching. The temptation, therefore, is to set oneself up for conceit.

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Another characteristic which Paul has discovered of false teaching was an argumentative nature in the false teachers. There was a morbid craving for controversy. That literally means “sick.”

Kind of a sickness for controversy which brings with it word battles, disputes of words. Semantic definitions are always being arrived at. The concern is discussion rather than obedience.

Another characteristic Paul has discovered was that it created bad feeling among God’s people. It broke out into all sorts of works of the flesh. Like envy and dissention, which are two words used and linked together in the New Testament. And slander, which is tearing down another person’s reputation. And base suspicions, which were evil and false conjectures about someone else. In addition to that, there was a wrangling, which was a continual rubbing against, a friction within Christian community as a result of the false teaching.

Paul says this kind of thing really comes from persons who are depraved in mind and bereft of truth.

The apostle had this great ability to be brutally frank. Honestly and lovingly frank. The words “depraved mind” (verse 5, NASB), which you speak of a depraved person, the word in its genesis actually meant a person who was spoiled or destroyed or ruined. To be depraved in mind speaks of a mind that’s spoiled and from whom the truth has been taken because they let it go.

Paul gives another characteristic of false teachers as money-hungry. Godliness for them is a means of gain. They’ve got a religious line because from it they can profit. If you attend a meeting where they’re at, more time is spent receiving an offering than preaching the gospel. Why? Because godliness is a means of gain.

There are more con artists and charlatans in the field of religion per square inch almost than any other territory. Some, even professing the name of the Lord, whose aim is to make gain out of

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their religious profession. And knowing that the people of God are tenderhearted and about the best suckers around sometimes.

III. In contrast, though, is the person of God.

The word “man” we can interpret broader to be “person.” Some characteristics of the person of God.

A. One, is that he is shunning these kinds of things—godliness for gain, wrangling. This sort of thing. The idea is, literally, a person who is fleeing from this kind of activity, constantly moving the other way, moving away from it.

B. Another characteristic of the person of God is the setting of right goals—righteousness and godliness. The word “godliness”—if you’ve been reading Timothy, notice how often it occurs. It is one of the most frequent words used.

One of the best definitions I’ve come across is a story of why a friend was such a successful football coach. The players were playing the game for this coach, not for the stands. It’s one thing to get out on a Saturday afternoon and make the big, outstanding, spectacular play and get the applause of the throng. But it’s quite another thing to take films of the game and know that during the course of the week every play is going to be seen on film and the minor mistakes are going to come out and minor faults. The players learn to play the game not for the sake of the grandstand but for the sake of the coach.

Even as the Christian in developing godliness learns to play the game not for the sake of the fans but for the sake of God himself. Developing that awareness of God in every area of life.

C. Godliness and faith, love and steadfastness. I love the word “steadfastness.” When we pray for the Lord to take a burden off of us, He can either take the burden off or He can give us strength to carry it. The idea of strength to carry is related to this word “steadfastness.”

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D. In addition to that, “gentleness,” which speaks of a good disposition, balance. If that is to be our aim then there are certain other things which also are to mark as the people of God.

E. Another thing is tenacity. The word is “Fight the good fight of the faith” (1 Timothy 6:12). In the language in which Paul writes, the word for “fight” is the word from which we derive “agony.” If we were transliterating this verse it would read something like this: “Agonize the good agony of the faith.” The word “agonize” was used in relationship to athletic contests. Paul is familiar with athletic contests in the Greek culture.

One writer has expressed this of what it means of athletic contests, and how the word “agony” is related to it. When we find that the gloves of the Greek boxer were fur-lined on the inside but made on the outside of ox hide with lead and iron sewed into it, and that the loser in a wrestling match often had his eyes gouged out, we come to some appreciation of what a Greek athletic contest might consist of. And a better understanding of how it is that we are to agonize in order to win. Fervent activity.

Agonize the good fight of the faith. In addition Paul gives another strong verb—“Take hold of the eternal life” (verse 12). Whereas the word “fight” is present continuing action, the word “take hold” is actually a stop-action verb. It literally means that the outcome of fighting the good fight of faith is that there comes the moment in which you make the pin, if you’re in a wrestling contest, and the thing’s over.

Timothy, who had already invited Christ into his life, had already tasted of the age to come, eternal life was already in him. But there was a moment in which eternal life is his forever. The outcome of his combativeness is that he received the victory. He’s taken hold. It’s settled. There is no more struggle. So take hold, Paul says, of eternal life.

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And take hold of the life which you testified of in the presence of many witnesses. No doubt Timothy's baptismal confession when he was baptized and the kind of testimony he must keep until the returning of the Lord Jesus Christ who himself testified (or made confession) before Pontius Pilate that He was the Son of God and the bearer of the truth.

When Paul comes to talk about the appearing of Jesus Christ, just like in chapter 1 when he talked about how Jesus Christ saved him—remember, in chapter 1 he broke into a praise or prayer to the Lord—he does the same thing here, just thinking about the work of God. He erupts into praise so that into his language now comes a praise. The blessed and only sovereign God is seen as powerful, the King of those who are being kings, the Lord of those who are being lords, who alone is undying, without death, and dwells in holiness in unapproachable light who no one can see or has seen.

Then there's that unique phrase occurring throughout the Bible, "to him be honor" (verse 16). Surely there are enough saints and angels around the throne giving Him honor. What does my voice have to do with this? Why am I encouraged to give honor to the Lord? There is one part of God's creation that will never honor Him unless it makes a statement to do that. That part of creation is me. Unless I say it. So by my joining in in saying, "To God be honor," I'm confessing that in my own life I'm giving myself to Him. If widows are to be honored and bishops are to be honored and elders are to be honored and other kinds of people are to be honored, then above all God must be honored and respected and revered.

F. Then Paul says to Timothy that he must keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach. Again, that concern for lack of reproach in the Christian's life.

IV. From the theme of false teaching and a competitiveness in your faith, Paul then in two places in chapter 6 speaks of being content in your financial security or insecurity.

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A. Verses 6–10 speak to the person who is without money and is saying to that person, “Be content.” Why? Paul is saying we need perspective. We need to recognize (verse 7) we brought nothing into the world and we can’t take anything out.

I think we need to recognize what this Scripture is saying and what it’s not saying. It’d be possible to bend the Scripture and say, “A Christian should only have food and clothing and nothing more than that. Anything more than that is out of the will of God.” But that’s not true. Paul will turn right around, beginning in verse 17, and talk to those who are rich in this world who are believers. And he’s not telling them to get rid of all they have.

So how am I content with just food and clothing when I have much more? I believe it’s a settled disposition that one comes to in Christ. Here’s a settled attitude which the Lord wants us to have. This is best illustrated by David’s conversation with the Lord in the Old Testament. He was praying, “Lord, let me build the temple,” and the Lord was saying to him, “No, you’re a man of war. And you haven’t been as faithful to me as you ought. Your son is going to build the temple. His hands are cleaner than yours.” Then he turns to David and says to him, “Nevertheless, it was good that it was in your heart.” I may have more than food and clothing, but in my heart I know that these things are peripheral and my life doesn’t depend on them. I think the Lord is saying, “It’s good that it’s in your heart.”

There is a need for trust in the Lord, verse 8. If we have food and clothing, we’ll be content. Can we honestly make that statement to the Lord, “I would be content with just food and clothing”? The secret of contentment is finding Christ with you in the midst of your circumstances rather than the need for additional things beyond Christ in these simple matters of life.

Paul is concerned, too, about the danger of desiring riches. Often the person who desires riches is in a much more spiritually difficult position than the person who has riches. Sometimes the desire

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can eat up a person more than the self-confidence of a person who may have developed that because of wealth. There could be, in the danger of pursuing riches, the illusion that if one gets riches it'll bring him happiness or security. There may be the danger which develops of selfishness in the pursuit of wealth. There may be wrong acquisition, ways which are developed. There maybe anxiety and worry which come through this desire.

But Paul is more concerned that the anxiety for wealth will be such as to lead people away from the faith, so that he uses the phrase that through this craving some have wandered away from the faith. That's a poetic word. It wasn't that one day the person got up and said, "I'm not going to be a Christian anymore." The word "wander" can be used of a person who goes out into the woods and he's cutting through a forest, making a turn here, a turn there. He gets lost. He doesn't do it consciously, but carelessly he gets lost. He has wandered away. He doesn't know how to get back.

Paul says this is the temptation or danger of a person who makes the acquisition of material means their overriding goal. That after a while they can lose their compass. After a while you can lose your compass and wander away from the Lord. He counsels us that if, in addition to food and clothing, we are absolutely demanding other kinds of things from God we will find that desire at the root of all of our evils.

B. To those who have wealth Paul says in verses 17–19 some very beautiful words. He does not tell them, as Jesus told the rich young ruler, "Go sell all your have." No. There is no wrong in wealth at all. In fact, there were wealthy persons within the first Christian church, as is clear from this text and others. But constraints. If constraints were placed upon slaves in regard to their behavior then there must be an even-sidedness. Constraints are also placed upon those who are extremely wealthy. There are perils to avoid: Pride and false dependence are two which are noted

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in verse 17. A fear Paul has that those who have wealth may begin to rely upon that rather than upon the Lord.

Also Paul enjoins qualities that are to be sought—to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and liberal and generous. Living with the perspective of laying up treasure for the future.

Here are some questions that come to mind as I try to read the implication of this chapter for my own life.

The first is this: Do I do my work in such a way that my Christian testimony is not subject to discredit? That the name of God is honored through my means of employment and my manner of working? What a terrific goal and ideal.

The second is based upon the passage of false teachers: Is my Christian experience discussion-oriented or obedience-oriented? We all need to discuss in order to find the implications of our faith. But there's also a time to obey. There is a danger of being caught up in word definitions, of semantics. There is an importance of obeying in clear areas of the gospel which are delineated for us.

A third question is in regard to finances: Am I seeking and spending money in a way that the Lord approves?

Paul tells Timothy, “Guard that which has been entrusted to you” (1 Timothy 6:20). The word “entrusted” was used in the first century to describe what was left in a bank. It was a deposit.

Paul is saying to Timothy, “Through my teaching, through this letter, certain things again have been deposited with you or deposited with you, period. Now guard those.” He's not calling Timothy to have a “Hold the fort” mentality—the world's shooting at us and we must stay behind the walls and look out every now and then. It's a kind of living trust that we keep. Certain attitudes, certain perspectives, certain matters of the heart, that are guarded by us so that we keep

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those values very much alive within us. Guard those things which have been entrusted or deposited with you. For, by not guarding them, certain persons have given themselves over to a false kind of knowledge. Grace be with you, Paul says.