

Final Charges

1 Timothy 6:17-21

Introduction

Paul leaves Timothy with some final charges; the first directed to the rich; command them not to be high minded or trust in uncertain riches; and second to reinforce Paul's earlier warnings to Timothy; guard the gospel and guide the people! Remember how the letter began; Paul reminded Timothy that he has been entrusted with the ministry (1:1-11). The Lord will enable or empower Timothy to do the work (1:12-17). Paul has given instructions for prayer, modesty and all manner of conduct. Paul has given charges to Timothy about what it means to be a good minister, a godly minister, and a growing minister (see chapters 4:1-16). Paul has given charges to the older saints, the widows, church leaders, servants, trouble-makers and now the rich and even the educated (see vv.20-21a).

To The Wealthy (vv.17-19)

1 Timothy 6:17–21 (NKJV) 17 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.

You might think; “this does not apply to me.” But if you live on more than two dollars a day, if you have access to clean drinking water, if you have running water and a flush toilet, if you have a cell phone or access to the internet you are rich in comparison to the vast majority of people living in the world. Half of the world's wealth is concentrated in less than 1% of the world's population. We can think of that statistic with another; 20% of the global population possess 90% of the global wealth. The United States represents about 5% of the world's total population yet consumes 70% of the world's goods and services.

The Lord Jesus warned that it is possible to be rich in this present world but not towards God (see Luke 12:13-21). Let me be clear. I believe Americans are rich and generous. The word “command” carries the weight of a military command (with an element of tenderness). It means to appeal or beseech or perhaps even beg. In a sense Paul is commanding Timothy to approach the rich in love and make an urgent appeal. There is also the expectation that the person will do exactly what the Lord requires. We are to avoid pride and embrace humility. We are not to be haughty or high-minded. The next phrase literally reads to the rich—do not *set your hope on the uncertainty of riches*. The expression ‘uncertain riches’ occurs only here in the Greek New Testament and is meant to convey a warning of sorts; in the grand scheme of things there are things that are certain and things that are uncertain. In the category of things that are certain we find *the living God*. In the category of the things marked *uncertain* Paul invites us to place riches at the top of the list. We should take great comfort in the fact that Paul reminds Timothy that God has given us *richly all things to enjoy*. The Bible does not prevent ownership or possessions or enjoyment.

We should pay proper attention to the warning. In what ways are riches uncertain? On the surface riches seem valuable, desirable, dependable. But with wealth comes danger. The danger

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is the temptation to trust the wealth rather than Christ. The danger in believing the lie that the wealth really are more beautiful, more valuable, more desirable than the poor.

We know the desire for wealth seems hard wired into our culture. Someone likened riches to drinking sea water. It does not quench thirst but only seems to increase thirst. Wealth makes promises it can never keep. Sometimes wealth instead of decreasing anxiety increases anxiety. The pursuit of wealth sometimes places people in the awkward position of obtaining wealth in ways that clearly do not honor God. The preoccupation and pursuit of wealth sometimes has a tendency to control lives. **But Paul adds the wonderful statement; God. . .gives us richly all things to enjoy.** The wealthy are not invited to feel guilty or ashamed or condemned for their wealth. Paul points out God has given us all things richly to enjoy—including wealth. Riches are a gift from God and we must find the balance between God honoring self-enjoyment and bringing much needed relief to a broken world and broken people.

The rich have every right to enjoy life and enjoy wealth. But Paul adds;

18Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share,

What is the best strategy to combat pride and a false dependence on wealth? Do good; exercise generosity and share sacrificially. Think of what Paul is saying; find ways to do good since generosity generates more generosity. Generosity is more than simply giving resources, or goods or services. It need not mean simply giving money—it can include giving your self. Doing good promotes community, compassion, mercy. **A willingness to share strikes an effective blow against pride and self-centeredness. We are disciplined to live with less that others might have more.** Let's look closely at the phrase "*ready to give, willing to share.*" Paul uses a word that relates to "fellowship" (*koinonikous*. . .) it is a word that incorporates the ideas of willingness (voluntary) and sharing. Being rich in good works does not always increase the bottom line on your financial statement—but in the long run—you are the asset—you are God's treasure and treasure chest.

19storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

What exactly is this verse saying? The rich are literally building foundations in heaven; *that they may hold on eternal life.* The phrase can't mean you buy your way into heaven through generosity. Who lays hold on eternal life? The rich or the poor who have benefited from the rich's generosity? The phrase storing up can be translated "amassing a treasure" while foundation can refer to a fund. **The idea seems to be that the rich need not be concerned about receiving a return on their earthly investment but rather on the riches it generates here on the earth that has returns in heaven.**

Paul is giving spiritual wealth management advice. Lay up wealth that lasts forever:

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1. Don't be high-minded.
2. Don't trust in the uncertainty of riches.
3. Do trust in God.
4. Do good and be rich in good works.
5. Do lay up treasures in Heaven.

Temptations On Earth

What does it mean to be haughty or high-minded (v.17)? The word haughty translates a very long compound Greek verb (*hypselpophroneo*) found only here in the Greet NT. There was a more common word used in ordinary conversation (*megalaphroneo*) which has caused some scholars to speculate if Paul adopted this word to communicate a fresh thought. Both words seem to include the ideas of arrogance or pride. Some have called this the pride of possessions. This temptation elevates the rich to believe that they really are morally or spiritually superior to the poor by virtue of their riches! One wise rabbi said, "Haughtiness towards men is rebellion to God." Pride makes us artificial. Humility makes us real. Spurgeon used to say that pride is a stab at Deity; it is an attack upon the undivided glory of God. In what sense? In the sense that pride insists that we have something to glory in and of ourselves! We think wealth makes us truly different.

Augustine wrote; "We all bow down before wealth. Wealth is that which the multitude of men pay an instinctive homage. They measure happiness by wealth; and by wealth they measure respectability. It is a homage resulting from a profound faith that with wealth he may do all things."

Thomas Brooks rightly said, "There are three things that earthly riches can never do: they can never satisfy divine justice, they can never pacify divine wrath, nor can they ever quiet a guilty conscience. And until these things are don, man is undone." No wonder D.L. Moody used to say, "God sends no one away except those who are full of themselves". Once again we are reminded that a person cannot trust in wealth and God at the same time.

Treasures In Heaven

How in the world do I open my account in Heaven? We have checking accounts and savings accounts. We have retirement accounts. We open our account in Heaven through Jesus Christ our Lord. We trust Him. We submit to Him. And since we reject the uncertainty of riches we grow in an ever increasing trust in the Lord. We trust our past to God's mercy and our present to God's love and our future to God's providence (Augustine).

Spurgeon warns; "Trust Jesus, and you are saved. Trust self, and you are lost." And so we cultivate a heart of generosity and sacrificial giving. We use our wealth for doing good.

No amount of good deeds can make us good people. We must be good in order to do good.

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In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said; “*Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*” (see Matthew 6:19-20NKJV).

To The Wise (vv.20-21)

20 Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge—

21 by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith. Grace be with you. Amen.

In this chapter Paul has told Timothy to flee evil and follow after good (v.11); fight the good fight of faith (v.12); faithfully fulfill your ministry (vv.13-14); warn the rich (vv.17-19); don't trust riches, use it to help others; **reject godless philosophies** (v.20). Now Timothy is told to guard or keep those things committed to his trust. What are these priceless privileges? The sound words of truth; the gospel of God, the message of grace and salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. “Let nothing cause you to deviate from the Gospel message and of the grace of God” (Oliver Greene, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to Timothy and Titus*; p. 21).

Paul does not reject knowledge but rather the so called superior claims of the false teachers and their false teaching. Paul rejects the useless speculations made with insufficient evidence that reject the revelation that God has made in His Word and through His Christ. It is true that all truth is God's truth. John Piper in a reflection on the academic slogan writes; “All truth is God's truth but all truth exists to display more of God and awaken more love for God. This means that knowing truth and knowing it as God's truth is not a virtue unless it awakens desire and delight in us for God's truth”.

What Paul has faithfully given to Timothy; Timothy must now faithfully impart to those in his charge. This means the message must be absent corruption, pollution, perversion. The essentials of the faith and the Gospel must not be twisted, perverted, polluted. We are both possessors of the faith and trustees of the faith. Timothy was to give to others what was given to him—exactly as he received it. **And now dear friends—this letter and its instructions have been given to you. You must entrust it to others.**

Guard The Gospel

1 Thessalonians 2:4-5; “But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. 5 For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness.”

In 2 Timothy 2:2 Paul says; “*And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*”

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Avoid And Abandon False Teaching

Paul gives a series of descriptors: false teaching is profane and vain babbling (v.20); the word profane (beblos) means common, irreverent, godless talk. The word vain means empty or meaningless or we might even say empty voices (Kenneth Wuest p. 103).

What a great title for the end-less talk show hosts who comment on every thing imaginable (*empty voices*). Late night talk shows; early morning talk shows; endless fruitless conversations on the moral, spiritual, political, cultural climate of our world. Godless chatter. The world offers an endless conversation on much of what matters little. **In the broken world truth is suspect or rejected. Godlessness matters most.** The word contradictions (v.20) are those words contrary to Christ; contrary to the Apostles teachings the message of the Gospel and the truth about the human condition. It is literally the word *antithesis*. *It means to stand against the gospel premise (thesis) or in this case; Paul's preaching.* What is being condemned is the false knowledge of men; knowledge that stands against truth or fact whether of God or true science (that is proven fact—that which is consistent with reality).

What is Paul's charge to Timothy? Take all the empty and meaningless talk or empty voices and turn away! Paul knew much of what poses as true knowledge is not true at all. But what if important people, educated people, scholarly people, expert people are making the empty sounds? The charge is very strong: from such turn away. **Do not embrace their views. Refute their views. Reject false philosophies, false psychologies, pseudo-science; false religions.**

Cults claim Christian character and Bible truth but often neglect both. How can you tell if something is false? *“By the Word of God, the revelation and record of Christ and of the truth of God. If the science or knowledge stands in opposition to the Word of God, turn away from it”* (see *The Preacher's Sermon and Outline Bible; 1 Thess.-Philemon p. 209*).

Does this mean Christians plead guilty to the charges of blind faith, mindless devotion; anti-intellectualism or anti-science? Perhaps some do. Christians do not claim to have all the answers; but we do claim that the Bible's claims about Christ and the Gospel; the Bible's claims about being the revelation of God; the claim that All Scripture is God breathed and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness and sufficient for the Jesus follower; it provides complete, sufficient information for every good work (see 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

William MacDonald writes; “Actually, no true findings of science will ever contradict the Bible, because the secrets of science were placed in the universe by the same One who wrote the Bible, God Himself. But many so-called facts of science are in reality nothing but unproved theories. Any such hypothesis which contradicts the Bible should be rejected” (*Believer's Bible Commentary; p.2103*).

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Paul does not have a problem with science (knowledge) but rather what is falsely called knowledge. We turn away from false claims to truth; and all forms of false teaching, novel or unbiblical ideas about the person of Jesus Christ, the Bible and the Gospel.

Paul knew apostates would come from within the ranks of the church. High profile believers often become high profile former believers. And the rank and file within the church will often leave the church with the explanation; “I no longer believe in Jesus or the Bible.” Most aren’t that blunt. Most simply say; “Religion didn’t work for me.”

Paul says “by professing it” (v.21)—what? False science. False knowledge. Empty voices. “*Some have strayed concerning the faith*” (v.21). There is a hint of hope in that statement. The one who strays might be persuaded to return and embrace the truth. The word ‘strayed’ literally translates a word that means ‘missed the mark’. We might think of this as abandoned the righteous path and chose another path. There seems to be hope that the one who has strayed can return to the right path. How many stories have you heard of people who make a profession of faith or raised in the church, or high profile ministries who abandon Christ and the gospel? They cite science, or hypocrisy, or insensitivity or selfishness and sin as the reason for leaving. They cite unasked or unanswered questions. Some have been seduced by sexual brokenness, materialism, rationalism, communism, socialism, skepticism, scientism, liberalism, and every other corrosive philosophical disease that infects the mind and the soul. These things harden the heart and provide and welcome blinders so that the infected recipient need not look squarely into the face of Jesus. **Have you lost your way? Have you taken a path that has left you with open sores and deep depression? Don’t waste anymore time on false teachers and false teaching. It’s not too late. Turn around. Get back on the path marked “true faith”.**

Conclusion

Paul closes with his trademark; “Grace be with you. Amen.” Grace is not simply a pleasant way to say goodbye. Here grace is that costly gift—given by God in Christ Jesus the Lord. Grace sustains us. God adds more grace. Amazing grace. Sufficient grace.

Paul has given us so much to think about. Correct incorrect teaching. Deal lovingly and fairly with all in the Church. The Church does not exist simply as a social club or cultural institution. The Church is the place where Jesus is worshipped, the saints grow and sinners are saved. How can we retain our focus on what matters most? **Remember Paul’s charges to Timothy:**

**Stay true to Christ Jesus. Promote Christ. Refuse pride.
Resist legalism and false doctrine. Trust God. Do good.**