

1 Timothy 6:17-21 “Guard the Deposit”
Proverbs 23
Psalm 49

(November 13, 2011)

Do not toil to acquire wealth.

Proverbs says that wealth is fleeting.

“When your eyes light on it, it is gone,
for suddenly it sprouts wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven.”

The rest of Proverbs 23 warns against a variety of other fleeting desires:

some people really want their kids to like them,
so they don’t discipline them (v12-14);

others pursue food and drink
and result in poverty (verses 19-21);

others pursue sex with the adulteress (v26-28);

others pursue alcohol and drugs (v29-35).

But the pursuit of riches, pleasure, power, or peace –
all comes to the same end.

As Psalm 49 says,

“even the wise die;

the fool and the stupid alike must perish and leave their wealth to others.

Their graves are their homes forever, their dwelling places to all generations,
though they called lands by their own names.

Man in his pomp will not remain; he is like the beasts that perish.”

You are going to die.

And there is nothing that *you* can do about it!

You cannot prolong your life.

And you cannot take the riches of this age with you.

As Psalm 49 says,

“when he dies he will carry nothing away.”

We have been using the Austrian Hymn as the tune for Psalm 49.

We are changing this in the reprint because the tune is far too triumphant,
but the reason *why* we used this tune is because the Austrian Hymn
has been the German national anthem since 1922,

and it has become famous for its triumphalist tone –

and hated by many Jews and non-Germans for its associations with Hitler.

We have used it with Psalm 49 because Psalm 49 subverts the triumphalism of man.

An older Dutchman (who had lived through the German occupation of the Netherlands)

once told me that he couldn’t stand singing the Austrian Hymn in church,
but when he saw the words of Psalm 49,

with its casting down of human pretensions,

he could sing it with gusto!

Sing Psalm 49
Read 1 Timothy 6

Introduction: Who Is God?

Paul concludes his first epistle to Timothy with two exhortations:

first, a charge to the rich,
and second, a charge to Timothy to guard the deposit entrusted to him.

These two exhortations are rooted in what Paul has said
about who God is in the middle of the chapter.

In v15 Paul says that God is the King of kings and Lord of lords.

We are used to thinking of Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords, right?

But sovereignty is not limited to one person of the Trinity.

Indeed, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15

that the Son will hand the kingdom over to the Father –

“after destroying every rule and every authority and power.

For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.”

(an echo of Psalm 110)

And after the Son has subdued all things,

“then the Son himself will also be subjected

to him who put all things in subjection under him,

that God may be all in all.” (1 Cor 15:24-28)

The point of Christ’s kingdom is to reestablish the rule (the dominion) of God.

You might say that the Son rules over the kingdom of grace,
so that the Father may be all in all in the kingdom of glory.

You can see this focus on the relationship between the Father and the Son throughout 1 Timothy.

In chapter 1, he opened by saying

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus

by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope...” (1:1)

“Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and Christ Jesus our Lord” (1:2)

Then in chapter 2:5

“There is one God,

and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (2:5)

And more recently in 5:21

“In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels” (5:21)

Where is the Holy Spirit?

As we have seen, the Holy Spirit is only mentioned at the end of chapter 3
(in the mystery of godliness, Christ was “vindicated in the Spirit”)

and the beginning of chapter 4 –
where the Spirit says that some will depart from the faith.

People sometimes say that the church has overlooked the Holy Spirit –
but at least some of the tendency to omit the place of the Spirit
is the result of the Spirit's own work (in the inspiration of scripture)!

The Holy Spirit is not looking to make a big deal about himself.
He points to the Son – who points to the Father.

Indeed, the coming of the Holy Spirit, in the scriptures
is all about the coming of the kingdom of *God*.
We talked about this yesterday in the Trinity study –
that while we can speak of the Kingdom of the Father,
and the Kingdom of the Son,
there is no “Kingdom of the Spirit.”

But that does not mean that the Spirit is irrelevant to the kingdom!

As Brad Kelly put it yesterday after the Trinity study,
“the kingdom may not be denominated as His, but it does not exist without Him.”

So, while the Spirit is essential to the work of the church –
the work of Christ in the church –
Paul can write an entire epistle with only a couple references to the Spirit!

It is important to speak rightly about God –
Paul's emphasis here at the end of 1 Timothy is to warn Timothy against
“the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called ‘knowledge’.”
but it is also important not to be

1. The Charge to the Rich (v17-19)

As I said a couple weeks ago,
most of us today would fit into the category of the “rich” in Paul's day.

But Paul does not set an absolute standard for wealth.
He speaks of “the rich in this present age.”

If you want to understand what Paul means by this,
then you need to understand what Paul means by “this present age.”

Jewish theology in Paul's day spoke of two ages:
this present age, and the age to come.

The present age is literally translated, “the now age.”

The present age is the Adamic age –
an age characterized by sin and death.
The present age is an age under judgment.

The age to come is the eschatological age – it is the time when everything is made right.
The prophets spoke of this in terms of the restoration of the house of David –
the day when God would come in judgment against his enemies
and would restore the fortunes of Israel and of David.

In most of Jewish thought,
the Messiah was an important figure in this new “age to come” –
but the centerpiece of the story was the restoration of Israel.

And that’s where Paul’s experience on the Damascus Road was so important.
Saul of Tarsus (as he had been called)
had expected God to restore Israel (and David’s throne, of course).
But he had expected this to come in the eschatological judgment
when God would vindicate Israel,
judge their enemies,
and exalt his people in the age to come.

But then Saul of Tarsus met Jesus on the Road to Damascus.
And he discovered that God had exalted Jesus to his right hand.
God had vindicated *Jesus*.

In other words, everything that Paul had expected to happen to Israel at the end of the age
had already happened to Jesus.

And this turned Paul’s world upside down.
It doesn’t change the two-age structure of Paul’s thought.
Paul still thinks in terms of “this age” and the “age to come,”
but it radically reshapes how these two ages are related.

As Paul said it earlier in 3:16,
“Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness:
He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit,
seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations,
believed on in the world, taken up in glory.” (3:16)

In Jesus, the age to come has dawned.
The final judgment has already been pronounced – *on Jesus*.

And since *he* has been vindicated in the Spirit and proclaimed among the nations,
therefore those who believe in Jesus now participate in powers of the age to come –

even as we live in this present age.

“This present age” could also be translated,
“the now age” - “the age of now”

And in fact, most people tend to live their lives oriented towards the “age of now.”

But Paul tells Timothy to charge the rich:

a. Do Not Set Your Hopes on Your Riches, but on God (v17)

¹⁷*As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.*

Why does Paul focus on the rich?

It is just as easy for the poor to set their hopes on becoming rich!

If Paul was just concerned for each individual (or group) in the church,
then he should have spoken to the various sorts of people –
like he did earlier in chapters 5-6.

But now he comes, at the end of his epistle, to give particular instruction
to those who are rich in this present age.

And the reason, I suspect, is found in the *effects* of what they do.

If a poor man is selfish and sets his hopes on riches, the impact of his sin is not so devastating.
But when a rich man sets his hopes on the uncertainty of riches,
the effect on others is profound.

With riches comes responsibility.

If you set your hopes on the uncertainty of riches,
then you will manage your riches in one way;
if you set your hopes on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy,
then you will manage your wealth in another way.

And Paul explains this in verse 18:

b. Be Rich in Good Works and Ready to Share (v18)

¹⁸*They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share,*

Those who have the riches of this age
should focus on “doing good” – being “rich in good works.”

The Bible is always positive when it talks about “good works.”
You will never find the scriptures condemning “good works.”

Paul will condemn those who think that by the “works of the law” they will be justified – but good works by definition are good!

I want you to see the pattern in Paul:

he sees the work of Christ in terms of this two-age view of the world – and because Christ has been raised up to the right hand of the Father – because *he* has received the promised inheritance, therefore, those who are *in him* now receive the firstfruits of the age to come – with the result that they live a life of good works:

Ephesians 2:4-10

⁴*But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved—*
⁶*and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*
⁸*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*
¹⁰*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17 takes a similar approach:

¹³*But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.*
¹⁴*To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*
¹⁵*So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.*
¹⁶*Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.*

In Titus 2:11-14, Paul says something very similar.

“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”

In all of these passages there is an emphasis on God's provision in Christ for our redemption, as well as a focus on the eschatological benefits that are ours in Christ, together with the result for the present age – namely, a people who are zealous for good works.

And, sure enough, Paul says the same thing here in 1 Timothy 6 – concluding his exhortation to the rich with verse 19:

c. Have an Eschatological Perspective on Life (v19)

¹⁹*thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.*

The works of the law will avail nothing for making yourself right with God!
You cannot possibly do *anything* to make God happy with you.

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

You are declared right – you are justified – freely by the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

But you can only “take hold of that which is truly life” by doing good
by being rich in good works,
by being generous and ready to share.

If your focus is on “getting rich” in the stuff and status of this age,
then your treasure is on earth – your treasure is here and now.

But those who set their hopes on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy,
store up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future.

This is what it means to have an “eschatological perspective on life.”

It means that you are not concerned with whether you get what is just and fair in this age.
You should be concerned with

How am I using what I have to be generous and to share with those in need.

Think back to the four things that Paul urges women to do (from 5:10)
if she has brought up children (loved for her family),
has shown hospitality (loved strangers),
has washed the feet of the saints (loved one another in the church),
has cared for the afflicted (loved those in need).

Love for family, strangers, the church, those in need –
these are the things that should characterize all Christians –

so if you have more resources than most Christians,
you should use what God has given you *more* for these things!

And in so doing, you “take hold of that which is truly life.”
So much of what we call “life” in this age
is really nothing more than death dolled up to look attractive.
That which is truly life is found in Jesus Christ.

And in Jesus Christ it overflows into everything else!

And then Paul suddenly says:

2. “O Timothy, Guard the Deposit” (v20-21)

a. What is the Deposit? (v20a)

²⁰*O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you.*

Notice that in the midst of an exhortation to the *rich*,
Paul turns to Timothy and says “guard the deposit.”

If Timothy does not guard the deposit, what will happen?

Thieves will break in and steal it.

Timothy has been entrusted with a precious deposit –
and he must guard it carefully.

Of course, the *way* that he must guard the deposit
is by teaching it – proclaiming it – making sure that this deposit
is entrusted to many others!

Because the deposit is nothing less than the truth of the gospel.
If Timothy fails to guard the deposit,
then a day will come when the deposit will have vanished.
And then, what will happen to the church?

That is why this exhortation must come together with the one to the rich.
The pastors of the church must continue to hold forth the eschatological hope –
the gospel of our blessed God and Savior Jesus Christ –
and we must continue to maintain that deposit.
Otherwise you will grab hold of something that is *not* life,
and you won’t realize your peril.

b. Avoid the Babble (v20b-21)

*Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called “knowledge,”²¹ for by
professing it some have swerved from the faith.*

In Timothy’s day you could find all sorts of irreverent babble.

Many believed that there was some sort of “secret knowledge”
that would give life and happiness.

Some things haven’t changed much.

People today often think that there is some secret formula to the “happy life.”
People are constantly running off to seminars for this
and reading self-help books for that –

if only I knew the secret...

Paul warns Timothy that if he swerves from the path of truth,
if he turns away from that which is truly life –
then he – and his hearers – will swerve from the faith.

This is why I seek to expound and apply the Word of God.

Because there is no secret knowledge –
there is only the mystery of godliness himself,
Jesus Christ himself,

who was manifested in the flesh,
vindicated in the Spirit,
seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations,
believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

And so Paul concludes:

Grace be with you.

Sounds pretty normal – pretty bland – right?

Except one thing:

It’s plural.

Paul is writing to Timothy (singular).

The whole epistle uses the second person singular,
focusing on Timothy as the “you” to whom Paul is writing.

But here at the end Paul writes:

Grace be with you [plural].

It’s almost as though Paul knew that this epistle would come to others –
and his exhortation to one pastor would be read by many other pastors –
and through them his message would come to hundreds –
even thousands of churches around the world.

Grace be with you.