

1 Timothy 6:1-21

The MP3 of this talk is available at: <http://awamos.com/sermons/1Tim6.mp3>

Intro

I'd like to start today by asking you a question:

Does being a Christian make any practical difference to the way you live your life? Or to express it another way, if someone studied your life and compared it to those around you, would they be able to see that you were unique, or would you just blend in with everyone else?

Today I intend to look particularly at how being a Christian might affect our attitude to work and our money.

We have been working through Paul's first letter to Timothy, and today we are looking at the last chapter 6, and this will in fact be the last sermon in this series.

In order to set the right context for all this, I would like to start by zeroing in on verses 3-5

Sound Doctrine

vs3, 4a

[3] If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, [4] he is conceited and understands nothing.

The first thing to note here is that doctrine matters! Not every church is teaching it!

In our society it is common to hold the idea that what is right for you is right for you and what is right for me is right for me and there is no absolute right. The question is, is all that absolutely right, and I would to say that it is absolutely wrong. There are absolutes in life.

You may be confused by all that talk of absolutes, but let me give you an illustration.

You may say that you don't believe in freight trains, but if you stand in the middle of the railway track long enough, you will find that no matter what your belief about them, they can still pack a punch.

There are things that are true - there are absolute truths.

To be a Christian is to receive and hold to and believe and base your life upon a set of truths. This is counter cultural! True Christianity has always been counter-cultural. Jesus was counter cultural.

And this knowledge of the truth is not just head knowledge - it affects our whole lives.

And in this passage, Paul points out that it affects our attitude to our money; if we are slaves, it affects our attitude to our masters; and if we are leaders, it affects our motivations and aims in that leadership.

Paul has spoken quite a lot about false teachers in this letter. It is obviously a matter that he considers to be of vital importance. It was of vital importance then, and it is still today.

There are many today who are called Christian ministers who deny that Jesus rose bodily from the dead, who deny that Jesus' death on the cross actually achieved anything. People who suggest that the role of the church is limited to that of bring reconciliation and justice between people, with no thought of bringing reconciliation between people and God. People who suggest that we can be reconciled to God through our own efforts, and we don't need a Saviour to pay the penalty for our sins.

These types of errors go to the heart of the Christian gospel, and turn our freedom in Christ into slavery.

Paul briefly defined true doctrine back in Chapter 2:

1 Tim 2

*[5] For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,
[6] who gave himself as a ransom for all men*

There is one God - the God revealed in the pages of the Bible, and there is only one way to be reconciled to him - and that is through Jesus' paying the ransom for us, clearing away the penalty for our rebellion against God.

It is the knowledge of this truth, this wonderful expression of God's love poured out on us, that sets us free. We are no longer trying to earn brownie points with God, and no longer living for the things of this world

Instead we are set free to joyfully serve our Lord and Saviour as he works in us to make us more like his Son Jesus. And that changes everything. And it changes our attitudes to our masters and our money.

Work

So, how does it affect our attitude to our Masters?

Firstly, I suppose I should say that work existed before the fall, it is part of God's very good design for us. But like everything else, it has become marred by sin and the curse.

In 1:10, Paul condemns slave trading as being contrary to sound doctrine. But, despite that view of slavery, Paul tells those who find themselves enslaved, that they should show respect to their Masters.

In that day, the whole of society ran on slavery. The slaves were not only the domestic servants and farm labourers, they were also the clerks, craftsmen, teachers, soldiers and managers.

You may recall the high position that Joseph had in Potiphar's house in Egypt, even though he was a slave.

Gen 39:4

Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned.

So slavery was very common, but why should Christian slaves respect their masters?

vs 1

so that God's name and our teaching (Apostles teaching) may not be slandered.

The situation they are in might be less than ideal, and no doubt in some cases it was horrible, but yet, they were to live in such a way that their behaviour would bring no dishonour to God's name and the Apostle's teaching would also be honoured.

Their physical situation isn't what is important. Because they have had Jesus love poured out on them, because they are looking to their future home, because they know that this world and it's trials and tribulations are temporary of little importance compared to the kingdom to come, because they want to live all of their lives in such a way that God is glorified, they are happy to cope with injustice, just so that God might be glorified

And for us today, that's how we are to deal with our employers. Whether they are good or bad, whether they are exploiting us or not, we are to give them respect, and deal with them in such a way that they have no reason to think badly of Christians.

And in that context, though we are to use every opportunity to tell others about Jesus, the reason we are employed is in order to do the work we are given, so we need to be sensitive about how we go about doing that.

It would in fact be great if, when they are next looking for staff they say - that Christian is a good worker, I'll see if I can get another one, rather than, that Christian is a slacker, and is always forcing his religion down the other workers throats, he is a nuisance - I don't want to get another one of those!

But what if they are Christian Masters? Can we then take it easy?

Vs 2

[2] 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.

Overall, it doesn't matter what our situation is, God's name and his glory must be our highest priority.

False Teachers

After talking about slaves and masters, as we saw earlier, Paul talks about those who teach false doctrines.

vss3-5

[3] If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, [4] 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 [5] 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.

These false teachers were in the business because they thought that they could get the riches of this world through their teaching roles. Paul says that sound instruction is from Jesus Christ and leads to godliness.

This is in stark contrast to the teaching of the false teachers, which leads to things that are definitely ungodly: controversies, quarrels, envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions, and constant friction.

Paul says that the false teacher is conceited and understands nothing. Paul is using strong language here. Those who do not conform to the teaching from Christ are to be rejected, and to be rejected strongly. That's because they divide the church and lead people astray.

Unfortunately the history of Christianity has been littered with examples of leaders who were or are, out to help themselves, rather than those whom they are leading. Certainly there have been numerous popes in the past who were guilty of this. In more recent times televangelists in the US have been continuing the tradition.

I suppose Christianity isn't such a big money spinner in Australia, but we still need to be on our guard against those who use their leadership to look after themselves, motivated by money or the love of power or prestige, rather than the glory of God.

Contentment

By contrast Paul tells us in vss 6-8

[6] But godliness with contentment is great gain. [7] For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. [8] But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.

Now, this IS consistent with the teaching of Jesus. In the Sermon on the Mount, recorded in Matthew 5-7

Matt 6:19-33

[19] "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. [20] But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. [21] For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

[25] "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?

[31] So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' [32] For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. [33] But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Jesus view of money, which is repeated by Paul, is diametrically opposed to the view that our society holds dear. Our culture teaches us that amassing the greatest wealth, living in the greatest luxury, is the thing to aspire to, that will bring us happiness and fulfilment in life.

But we only have to look at the lives of those who supposedly are the winners in our society - the top AFL players, the movie stars and so forth, and we see so many of them with broken marriages, unable to form lasting relationships, addicted to drugs, desperately seeking meaning in their lives.

That's not the way to contentment - that is not "winning".

In Britian, lottery winners have formed a support group to help each other deal with the problems and dissatisfaction of having lots of money. A British Psychologist has found that big money lottery winners, six months after their win, statistically are no happier than victims paralysed from car accidents.

That's one of the things that is instructive hanging around Nursing Homes. Many of these people have been the high flyers of the past. Now they are reduced to living in a single ensuite room, bare of almost every personal possession, except maybe a TV and a few photos. Many of them feel deserted by family and friends. Where has all their wealth and fame got them?

That's the thing with possessions, we might not like to admit it, but we DO have to give it all back. Someone else will get it in the end, and probably most of it they will take to the tip!

So Paul exhorts Timothy:

vss 9-11

[9] 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. [10] 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.

[11] But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.

So we are not to pursue money, but instead we are to pursue righteousness. Because as Paul said back in vs 6 "godliness with contentment is great gain".

And Paul is speaking from personal knowledge in this regard - he has proved that it works in his own life:

Philippians 4:11-14

for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. [12] I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. [13] I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Note that it is Christ who gives him the strength to do this. As one commentator said, contentment isn't self sufficiency, it is Christ sufficiency. Having Christ gives us all that we really need.

Riches

So is being rich wrong? Having money is not wrong in itself, it is the love of it that is the problem. In vs 17, Paul says that "God provides the things in this material world for our enjoyment."

After all, before the fall, we get in Gen 2:12 we are told that "the gold in that land was good". God created a good world for us to enjoy. Unfortunately it has been marred and disfigured, but there is still much good in it if we use it the way God intended.

The message of the Bible is very different to Eastern religions on this point. Eastern religions tell us that this material world is the problem, we need to escape from it and its pleasures. Buddhism majors on this idea. Gnosticism, an early form of which was around when Paul wrote this letter, had the same view.

But the Christian world view is different. The physical world isn't evil in essence, it was originally good, but is now fallen and distorted. Jesus demonstrated this by his physical resurrection, and eating fish and so on. The new heaven and a new earth are going to be physical realities.

So we need to view this world and its pleasures appropriately, as God intended. So we are not to be ascetics and take a vow of poverty and live on a pole or in a cave. However we are to use our wealth wisely. After all, riches are so fickle.

vs 17

[17] 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.

In today's economic climate, we so often hear of people who had thought that they had their future all mapped out ahead of them, they've got plenty of money, and then discover they have lost the lot, due to some foolish investment or unscrupulous advisor - and it's all gone belly up.

The only reliable investment is in our relationship with God.

How then live?

So, given all that, how are we to live?

I am reading a book at the moment by a guy called K.P. Yohannan, called Revolution in World Missions. K.P. is an Indian guy who started an international mission organisation called Gospel for Asia that exclusively trains and deploys local evangelists.

After some years as an itinerant evangelist, he moved to the USA to get more theological training. I was rather struck by his reaction to being in the homes of Christians when he arrived, I suspect that what he says is just as much true of Australia as it is of the USA:

Americans are more than just unaware of their affluence - they almost seem to despise it at times.... I stared in amazement at how they treated their beautiful clothes and shoes. The richness of the fabrics and colors was beyond anything I had ever seen. As I would discover again and again, this nation routinely takes its astonishing wealth for granted.

As I would do many times - almost daily - in the weeks ahead, I compared their clothing to that of the native missionary evangelists whom I had left only a few weeks before. Many of them walk barefoot between villages or work in flimsy sandals. Their threadbare cotton garments would not be acceptable as cleaning rags in the United States. Then I discovered most Americans have closets full of clothing they wear only occasionally - and I remembered the years I traveled and worked with only the clothes on my back. And I had lived the normal lifestyle of most village evangelists.

- Revolution in World Missions, K.P.Yohannan, P 43

In the book, K.P.'s argument, is that we need to take a long hard look at ourselves, to analyse how much we are just products of our society, and how much we truly have kingdom priorities.

He is effectively asking us think about whether we really need that extra shirt, that upgraded car, the latest mobile phone, a big house?

If we are retired, or close to it, do we need to keep all our possessions, or given that we will have to give it all back soon anyway, shouldn't we be downsizing and using the profits for gospel work?

And if we are not retired, why accumulate so much, if we won't need it in the long term anyway?

We need to ask ourselves, what are our priorities in reality? Do our actions - how we spend our money, match what we claim to believe?

What should we spend it on?

In what verse 18 says to Timothy concerning those who are rich (like us)

vs 18

[18] Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.

If we are to do that, where should our efforts go? What should we do with what we share, what should our priority be? I would be remiss if I just said "Give" without commenting on where to give.

Earlier in the letter Paul gives us some clues in this regard. Back in 1:15, Paul said:

[15] Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners

And later in 2:3-7, Paul said:

[3]God our Savior, [4]... wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. [5] For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, [6] who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time. [7] And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle

If saving sinners was the purpose that Jesus came into the world, and the purpose that drove Paul, then we too should have this same priority - to ensure that our lives and our possessions are all being used with this primary aim in mind

Implication - use money to preach the gospel

I am not saying that we shouldn't provide for the poor, or seek justice for the oppressed, that is all part of being Godly, but there are also many secular organisations doing that. Our work as Christians, if it is going to be distinctive must have a gospel edge. If we are not caring for people's eternal welfare, how loving are we being in reality?

And in reality, as has been proved time and time again, when people have their lives and their culture transformed by the gospel, they will, normally, be better off physically and mentally as well.

Just on Friday I heard about a book written by a Zambian woman named Dambisa Moyo, who has a PhD in Economics from Oxford. The book is called Dead Aid - in contrast to the Live Aid concerts. Dambisa spoke recently at the Festival of Dangerous Ideas at the Sydney Opera House.

She says that:

In the past fifty years, more than \$1 trillion in development-related aid has been transferred from rich countries to Africa. Has this assistance improved the lives of Africans? No. In fact, across the continent, the recipients of this aid are not better off as a result of it, but worse—much worse.

- <http://www.dambisamoyo.com/deadaid.html>

- <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/fora/stories/2009/10/09/2709561.htm>

She is saying that aid makes things worse not better! She doesn't say that all overseas aid or emergency relief is wrong, and I would think that grass roots aid like that delivered through TEAR Fund is not what she had in mind.

But the problem with such aid is that so much of it just feeds corruption and supports lazy government.

I would suggest to you that a much better long term solution is having the gospel coming in and transforming those societies.

And on that topic, I was amazed to see the honesty expressed in the comments of a journalist for the Times newspaper in England at the end of last year.

His name is Matthew Parris and he wrote:

Before Christmas I returned, after 45 years, to the country that as a boy I knew as Nyasaland. Today it's Malawi, and The Times Christmas Appeal includes a small British charity working there. Pump Aid helps rural communities to install a simple pump, letting people keep their village wells sealed and clean. I went to see this work.

It inspired me, renewing my flagging faith in development charities. But travelling in Malawi refreshed another belief, too: one I've been trying to banish all my life, but an observation I've been unable to avoid since my African childhood. It confounds my ideological beliefs, stubbornly refuses to fit my world view, and has embarrassed my growing belief that there is no God.

Now a confirmed atheist, I've become convinced of the enormous contribution that Christian evangelism makes in Africa: sharply distinct from the work of secular NGOs, government projects and international aid efforts. These alone will not do. Education and training alone will

not do. In Africa Christianity changes people's hearts. It brings a spiritual transformation. The rebirth is real. The change is good.

He concludes:

Those who want Africa to walk tall amid 21st-century global competition must not kid themselves that providing the material means or even the knowhow that accompanies what we call development will make the change. A whole belief system must first be supplanted.

And I'm afraid it has to be supplanted by another. Removing Christian evangelism from the African equation may leave the continent at the mercy of a malign fusion of Nike, the witch doctor, the mobile phone and the machete.

- http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/matthew_parris/article5400568.ece

Funnelling our money into direct gospel work is in fact the best way to care for people, now and into eternity!

How much?

Well, OK, then how much should we spend?

Obviously this is between us and God, and we don't want to be legalistic, but we are to be generous.

In Jesus day, it was just expected that people would give a tithe, 10% of what they had. To be generous meant going beyond that.

But this is where Paul's comments about contentment come in. We need to be taking a radical look at what we spend our money on, how we use our time.

What are our priorities? Do our priorities, as seen in how we actually spend our money, they line up with this over arching goal of saving sinners?

How much do we just conform to the expectations and norms of the people around us, rather than letting the critical need for people to hear the gospel drive what we do? Are we any different, or do we just merge into the background?

Conclusion

I started off by saying that sound doctrine was key. From that flows our priorities, and that will affect our lives - it will affect the way we work, and the way we use our resources.

So lets continue to study God's word and be people who's lives are reflections of sound doctrine.

And to that end, I would like to finish with a quote from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount

Matt 6:33-34

[33] But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Seek first the Kingdom of God.