

## "Words for Pastor and People" (Part 10)

In today's Scripture we're looking at the Apostle Paul returns to a theme that's prominent in his letter to Timothy: what to do with those in the church who are teaching unsound doctrine.

"Teach and urge these duties. Whoever teaches otherwise and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that is in accordance with godliness is conceited, understanding nothing, and has a morbid craving for controversy and for disputes about words. From these come envy, dissension, slander, base suspicions, and wrangling among those who are depraved in mind and bereft of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain" (1 Timothy 6:2b-5).

There was tremendous turmoil in the church in Ephesus caused by those teaching false doctrines, and Timothy is to put a stop to this. The alternative to unsound doctrine is mentioned in verse 3: *teach the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ!* We are so blessed to have the words of Jesus in the New Testament! That should be the core of our teaching in the church today. This kind of teaching leads to godliness, Paul says.

I know we've covered this warning about false doctrine a number of times in these sermons from 1 Timothy, but it was a critical issue then, and it is now. Several weeks ago I read an article that said New York Theological Seminary in Manhattan closed its doors on July 1<sup>st</sup> of this year. Several well-known graduates of this seminary were Eugene Petersen, author of *The Message* paraphrase of the Bible, and religious broadcaster Pat Robertson. However, the seminary said the legacy and mission of the seminary will be preserved through a "long-term strategic partnership" entered in with Union Theological Seminary, also located in New York City. (Another closed seminary, Episcopal Divinity School, also has such a relationship with Union Seminary). Here's some interesting information about Union Theological Seminary. It was started by Presbyterian ministers in the 19th century, but now describes itself as progressive, and trains "people of all faiths and none" in works of "social justice." It trains people *of all faiths ...or none...in works of social justice*. So, I guess, if you're a Hindu, or Buddhist, or even an atheist, you can go there to be trained in social justice activism. But what about Jesus? Or solid Christian theology? The huge issue of unsound doctrine was not limited to the first century!

One of the outcomes of the false teachers in Ephesus was that some were trying to use their religion as a means of selfish gain. "Imagining that godliness is a means of gain" (verse 5b). *The Message* has it: "They think religion is a way to make a fast buck." Earlier in the letter Paul said those who preach and teach the gospel should get decent pay (we looked at that last week). But that doesn't mean the *primary* motive in teaching and preaching should be material gain.

In a number of sermons I've preached here I've mentioned the *prosperity gospel*, and how that's a distortion of the Biblical message. "Give to God, and God will make you prosper financially." This is sometimes promoted by TV preachers. Give to God – *and especially my ministry* - and you'll get plenty of money in return. When we give generously, God *does* bless us and promise to provide our *needs*. But Jesus never promised that God would supply our *greeds*. And Jesus Himself set the example: He wasn't materially wealthy, and didn't even have a home to call his own.

Thinking of the false teachers who say that being godly is a means to becoming wealthy, Paul warns of the danger of *wanting to be rich*. "Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it, but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these" (1 Timothy 6:6-8). There *is* tremendous gain in living a godly life, but it isn't *worldly gain*. The key here is to learn *contentment* – learning to be satisfied and content if we have the *necessities* of life, if we don't think we "need" all the other "stuff"!

Then he reminds us of something we all know: "For we brought nothing into this world, and we can take nothing out of it" (verse 7). We can't take it with us! I did hear of one man who kind of tried! I saw this newspaper article some time ago about a man who had a Mercedes-Benz that he loved. When he died, he had his casket trimmed with parts of a Mercedes! That's sort of like the Egyptian kings and queens who were buried, along with their possessions, in the tombs. Of course, the gold and jewelry etc. stayed behind! A very, very wealthy person died. Two gossipers at the funeral were talking. One whispered, "How much did he leave?" The other said, "Everything!"

So, the Apostle says, if we have food and clothing, we should content. Paul practiced that himself. He wrote this to the Philippians: "Not that I am referring to being in need, for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Philippians s 4:11-13).

But it's hard for us living here in the United States, isn't it! We are constantly being told that we have to have *more, and more, and more*. The latest model of this or that. More clothes and shoes when our closets are already full. In a graveyard in England there's a tombstone with this inscription: "She died for want of things." The husband's marker is beside it, and it reads: "He died trying to give them to her." (Of course, the genders could be switched)!

Advertisers spend millions of dollars on clever ads to convince us that if we don't get more than we've got we can't be happy, or we won't be cool. So, we're constantly prodded to be unsatisfied with what we've got. There was an interesting article a few weeks ago in the Lancaster paper. About auto dealers being stuck with vehicles on their lot – many of which are higher end, higher priced, vehicles with all the newest gadgets and technology. And now, the average cost of vehicles is so high, and the interest rates are so high, that people can't – or won't – spend the money to buy them. We bought one of those SUV's last year. One with the super technology. And I have trouble figuring out how to find the radio station I want. No simple buttons to turn. More than one person has agreed, and said, I just want the basic car, not all the fancy stuff!

Paul writes, "If we have food and clothing, we will be content with these." *Right!* How much of what you and I have do we really need? How much do you need, how much do I need, to be content? How much is enough?

The Scripture continues: "But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains (1 Timothy 6:9-10).

Those who *desire* to be rich fall into many traps. Note: You don't have to *be* rich; just *desire* to be rich. This "plunges people into ruin and destruction" (verse 9). Think of some of the ugly things people do for money, or possessions. Tramping over people, ruining relationships, just to get ahead Lying, cheating, breaking the law – for money. Children, relatives, fighting over who gets what when a family member dies. I once worked in the Trust Department of a bank. Part of the work was settling estates. I remember one day when I got a phone call regarding an estate, and I talked to my boss about it. He just smiled and said, "They want their money." The family was gathered in the attorney's office, waiting to hear the reading of their departed loved one's will. The lawyer read what various family members were to be given, then he read this, "And to my nephew, Jonathan, who often dropped hints that I should remember him in my will, please take a moment of silence to think about Jonathan."

Verse 10a says, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." Some translations have it: "For the love of money is the root of *all* evil." I don't believe the love of money is behind *all* evil. The motive behind some wrongdoing can be sexual lust, or the desire to get even with someone. But the love of money *does* lead us into undesirable things. Think of the number of people drowning in consumer loans and credit card debt because we want things we can't afford, and often don't need. Many Christians aren't giving to the church or the work of the gospel because we're spending money we don't have. This poor stewardship of our money and possessions seriously curtails the work of the church and spreading of the gospel.

This Scripture says that some have even "wandered away from the faith" (verse 10). Loving and wanting too many material things can hinder our relationship with God and curtail our spiritual growth. In the parable of the sower – a parable of Jesus - the seed that fell among thorns represents those who hear the Word of God, but "the cares of the world, and the *lure of wealth*, and the *desire* for other *things* come in and chokes the word, and it yields nothing" (Mark 4:19). Jesus said we can't serve two masters: "You cannot serve God and wealth" (Matthew 6:24).

These are hard words for us, aren't they? Jesus said, "One's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions" (Luke 12:15). Inward contentment and fulfillment in life doesn't come just from material things. The secret of happiness lies not in *things*, but in *relationships*. *Having a relationship with God...and love-filled relationships with people*.

But what if we are wealthy in the material sense? Some of us are living comfortably. We've got money! (Just a reminder, even the poorest of us in the United States are better off than a huge chunk of the world's population that live in other countries).

There's nothing wrong, in itself, with being wealthy. Jesus associated with rich people. Some of them supported Him in His ministry. He never said it's sinful to be rich, but He did warn that it would be *hard* for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. Jesus knew the dangers and

pitfalls of becoming too attached to material things.

Almost at the end of the letter, Paul instructs Timothy what to say to those in the church who are materially wealthy. (Remember, that includes many of us Americans). "As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches but rather on God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life" (1 Timothy 6:17-19).

The first words for the rich are: *Don't be proud or haughty*. Don't let your money go to your head. 1 Corinthians 4:7 says, "What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?" Everything we have has been given to us by God. We are only managers, stewards, of what God has entrusted to us.

Next, it says, *Don't set your hopes on uncertain riches, but on God*. I need not tell you that wealth is uncertain. The stock market rises and falls. We may be faced with unexpected expenses that eat into our savings and investments. Jesus said, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19-21). Don't set all your hopes on riches.

Finally: *Do good, and be rich in good works and sharing with others*. People with money have a tremendous opportunity to do good! Being rich in generosity, in giving to others out of our abundance, has a great payoff. "By doing this they will be storing up their treasure as a good foundation for the future so that they may experience true life." (1 Timothy 6:19 New Living Translation).

Recently I was at CVS, waiting in line. A young lady in front of me had on a T-shirt with a Bible verse on the back – one of my favorite verses: "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope" (Jeremiah 29:11). That kind of made my day! Then I glanced over to my side, and there was a man who had a T-shirt on, with some words also on the back. And what it said, I believe, is a great way to end this sermon. It said something like this: "You make a living by what you get; you make a life by what you give."

*Harry L. Kaufhold, Jr.*  
*Community United Methodist Church*  
*August 18, 2024*

