

## 1 Timothy 6:6-10 "Christ-Centered Living in a Me-Centered World"<sup>\*\*[1]</sup>

Main Idea: In 1 Timothy 6:6-10 we're reminded that there are two approaches to life, two paths on which to walk.

- I. There is the path of godliness (6-8).
  - A. A godly person exhibits contentment (6).
  - B. A godly person exhibits an eternal perspective (7).
    1. We came empty handed.
    2. We'll leave empty handed.
  - C. A godly person understands the difference between needs and wants (8).
- II. There is the path of greed (9-10).
  - A. Instead of God, it's gold (9a).
    1. Having money isn't the issue.
    2. Having to have it is.
  - B. Instead of freedom, it's a trap (9b).
    1. It leads to ruin.
    2. It leads to eternal destruction.
  - C. Instead of fulfillment, it produces more sin (10).
    1. Some wander from the faith.
    2. They pierce themselves with many sorrows.

A Challenge: Let's allow Thanksgiving to turn into Thanks *living* this holiday season.

1. Make sure you give thanks to the Giver for His gifts.
2. Make sure the gifts don't take the place of the Giver in your life.
3. Make sure you use the Giver's gifts for His purposes and honor.

Every once in awhile the Lord sends something into your life that shakes you and reminds you that He's not the God of the status quo, nor does He intend for us to fall into the complacency of the American dream. A couple of weeks ago, I was talking with one of our Romanian translators, Cristi Kivu, the director of RAM (Romanian American Mission) and he asked me if I had heard of Richard Wurmbrand.

"I have," I told him. "I just read his book *Tortured for Christ* this year.

"Richard and his wife were very good friends of my wife's parents," he shared. "In fact, they gave us their wedding rings for a wedding present, and we wear them to this day."

And then Cristi shared with me the following story while driving in his car in Bucharest, the capital of Romania, a story about the "death cell" where Wurmbrand was incarcerated for three years in this same city of Bucharest. But first, a little background...

In the 1940s, Richard Wurmbrand and his wife Sabina were faithful servants of Christ in Romania, and then they both were arrested by the Communists and imprisoned for Christ. Beginning in 1948, Richard spent eight and a half years in prison, was released briefly, but since he kept preaching Christ, he was rearrested in 1958 and endured years of unthinkable torture, including the death cell.

Cristi told me the death cell was basically an underground box that was Wurmbrand's "home" for three years. His captors fed him just enough food to keep him alive, so they could torture him and try to force him to deny Christ and praise Communism. He spent week after week, month after month, in isolated darkness. To keep his sanity, he prepared sermons and preached them to the only audience he had, to God Himself. As time passed, his body and mind began to break. He was a brilliant man and had memorized large quantities of Scripture. He quoted Scripture aloud, but eventually the solitude robbed him of the words. Toward the end all he could do was utter the word "Jesus." Many died in the death cell, but in God's gracious providence, Wurmbrand survived. Finally, in 1964 he was ransomed from Romania for \$10,000 and sent to the USA. Later he began the ministry now known as "Voice of the Martyrs."

In 1990, after the fall of Communism in Romania, Richard and Sabina returned to their homeland after 25 years of exile. A Christian printing facility and bookstore were opened in Bucharest, and the government officials approached Wurmbrand.

Christi told me that Wurmbrand requested a place to store the Christian literature, literature that was once forbidden. The city officials agreed and took Wurmbrand to an available basement room, which just happened to be located below the palace of the former Communist dictator, Ceausescu. Wurmbrand looked around and realized it was the very room from which he had cried out to his Savior three decades earlier!

Beloved, we may not understand God's ways now, but we can most certainly affirm that God has His ways and they are good. In four days we're going to observe a holiday called Thanksgiving. It's a great holiday for it gives us the opportunity to stop and give credit to the One to whom credit is due.

I hope you'll be with us on Wednesday evening at 7:00, for we're going to give you the opportunity to do just that, to give credit to the Lord in a Thanksgiving Praise Service for what He's done in your life this year.

But this morning I want to preach a message to help us respond rightly to the things we possess in life. Brothers and sisters in Christ, we're called to a life that is radical, that goes against the flow, and that includes the way we view our possessions.

How should a Christian view the things of this world? How should he view his home, whether it's a three bedroom ranch or an underground death cell? What should be his attitude towards the stuff of life, towards money, houses, pizza, boats, cars, and dining room sets?

We have the answer, for our gracious God gave it to us in His Word. Our text was written by a man who himself spent time in prison. In Paul's first letter to Timothy, 1 Timothy 6:6-10, we discover that there are two approaches to life, two paths on which to walk. One characterizes your life and mine today.

### I. There is the path of godliness (6-8).

"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."

Our text appears at the end of 1 Timothy. One of the key themes this letter addresses is the inherent danger of false teaching. False teaching can kill a church. In fact, a sure way to destroy a church is to ignore the importance of sound, scriptural, Christ-centered, doctrinal teaching, and allow people to teach whatever they want.

Timothy had a job to do in the church at Ephesus. He was to deal with false teachers. "As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer (1:3)."

We get an idea what the false teachers were like in 4:1-2, "The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith [i.e. sound teaching] and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron."

What in the world would motivate someone to abandon God's good Word in favor of the chaff of human speculation? We find out in 6:3-5, "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."

There's the answer. The mentality of a false teacher is to use his teaching to get something *he wants*. He has a utilitarian view of godliness. He uses religion to get what he wants.

False teachers think godliness is a means to financial gain. "Send me your gift of \$250 and I'll send you my recent book, *How to Be Healthy, Wealthy, and Wise*." That's using godliness for financial gain.

But you don't have to be a false teacher to do that. Have you ever heard someone say, "I'll do anything to get my family back. Why, I'll even try religion if that's what it takes!"? Yet this person, in essence, is no different from the health and wealth preacher. He is trying to use God to accomplish a personal agenda. He thinks that godliness is a means to something.

Which raises the question... Just what is godliness, then? Verses 6-8 give us three identification marks of a truly godly person.

**A. A godly person exhibits contentment (6).** "But godliness." Stop there. "But" indicates a contrast. A truly godly person will be very different from the false teacher depicted in verse 5.

"But godliness with contentment is great gain." The Greek word for godliness is *eusebeia* which means "piety" or "reverence." It suggests a God-ward orientation in life.

What will be true of a person who is truly godly? Oh, it's easy to portray yourself as a "godly" person: "Look at Roger. He goes to church. He even teaches the Bible. He's such a godly person." But is he really?

Here's a characteristic that indicates a person who possesses godliness. *Contentment*. A godly person is a content person. He doesn't use his religion to get something from people. Rather he exhibits contentment.

The word Paul uses is *autarkeia* which literally means "self-sufficiency." The Stoic philosophers used the word to describe a person who was unmoved by outside circumstances. To be content means you're satisfied with what God has given you. You see yourself as being sufficient in His care. That kind of godliness, godliness with contentment, is great gain.

I spent five days with a Christian family in Moldova earlier this month. They have very little compared to the world, but what they have they joyfully shared with us. Their food, their beds, their outhouse. I noticed one night our hostess had scrubbed my shoes clean. At the end of the week they actually gave us

a gift, a box of chocolates. Just think of that. They'd already given us their food, their beds, their wood to keep us wood, and then they gave us a gift to thank us for the privilege of giving to us! How humbling! And how instructive!

Are you content with what God has given you, and do you use it for His purposes? You say, "How can I learn to be more content?" If we remember verse 7, it will help, "For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it." The Spanish have a proverb, "There are no pockets in a shroud." Here's the second identifier.

**B. A godly person exhibits an eternal perspective (7).** Why choose godliness? Because it lasts! It matters for eternity.

Let me ask you a question. What did you have in your possession the day you entered this world? The same thing I did. Nothing. Absolutely nothing. The truth is...

1. *We came empty handed.* Let that sink in. Do you realize that what you have today you have by the grace of God? You didn't choose your parents, did you? Did you have anything to do with selecting the country in which you were born? We are what we are, and we have what we have by the grace of God.

"Yea, but I worked hard to get what I have. I'm a self-made man." Are you really? Is there such a thing as a self-made person? Listen. I'm not undermining the importance of stewardship and hard work. Jesus did say, "To whom much is given much is required."

But let's give credit to whom credit is due. 1 Corinthians 4:7 rightly asks, "For who makes you different from anyone else? [So you're good with your hands. Who gave you your hands?] What do you have that you did not receive? [Your voice--no, you received that; Your brain--no, it too was a gift] And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?"

The truth is, we came empty handed. And our text indicates...

2. *We'll leave empty handed.* What are you going to take with you on the day you leave this life? God's Word says, "Nothing—it is certain we can carry nothing out."

In 1983, while his country was basically starving to death, the Romanian dictator Nicolai Ceausescu began to build a palace for himself, as well as to house government administrative offices. To make room for it, he demolished nineteen Orthodox churches, six Jewish synagogues, three Protestant churches (plus eight relocated churches), and 30,000 residences. In its place he constructed the world's second largest building (next to the Pentagon). It contains 1,100 rooms, had 480 chandeliers, was filled with beautiful marble, hardwood, and cost over ten billion dollars.

Do you know how much of this world's treasures Ceausescu took with him when he died in 1989? Exactly what you'll take with you. *We brought nothing into the world, and we will take nothing out of it.*

That's a sober thought, but a godly person thinks sober thoughts. He looks at life from an eternal perspective. So why do we scratch and claw to get things that we're going to leave behind anyway? Why would we fight with a sibling over a family heirloom, only to get it and then later leave it behind ourselves?

Here's a guarantee. You *can't* take it with you. But you have a choice while you're here. You can live for *things*, or you can live as God's steward of things.

Someone put it this way, "*Do your givin' while you're livin'. Then you're knowin' where it's goin'.*" A godly person is content and lives with an eternal perspective.

**C. A godly person understands the difference between needs and wants (8).** What do we really need? Verse 8 explains, "But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that." Food and clothing. The KJV says "food and raiment."

The Greek term for "clothing," *skepasmata*, simply means "covering," and probably includes both the dwelling in which we reside and the garments that we wear (Hendriksen, 199). Hendriksen translates the two words "nourishment and shelter."

Genuine godliness is marked by contentment with food and covering. What's true of those two things? They are *basic necessities of life*. Jesus said in Matthew 6:31-33, "So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you *need them*. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

A godly person understand the difference between needs and wants. Like the Quaker who was watching his neighbor move in. He watched as the well-to-do man unloaded all his expensive furnishings and toys, the kind that "successful" people collect. The Quaker finally went over to his new neighbor and said, "Neighbor, if ever thou dost need anything, come to see me, and I will tell thee how to get along without it (Wiersbe)."

So here's the first approach to living. It's godliness. A godly person exhibits contentment, lives with an eternal perspective, and knows the difference between needs and wants.

Don't misunderstand. These are not steps you climb to become godly. They are evidences of true godliness. How do you obtain godliness? You must receive it, not earn it. It's a gift from God. It's yours, by grace, the moment you repent of your sins and put your trust in Christ as your Savior and Lord (see 1 Tim. 3:16).

But if you have it, you'll see it. You'll see *Him* in your life. Your life will reflect your Savior. Is that true of you? There's a second approach to life. The first is godliness.

## II. There is the path of greed (9-10).

In verses 9-10, Paul describes the opposite of the God-centered life. In candid terms, he presents the self-focused life of the greedy person.

What's true of a greedy person? When I think of someone who is greedy, I think of Scrooge, that crotchety miser who went through life thinking only of himself. But the sad truth is, greed shows up in lots of ways, some of which may be in our lives today.

How can you tell if you're a greedy person? And what's the inevitable outcome of living a greedy life? In verses 9-10 we find three characteristics of greed.

**A. Instead of God, it's gold (9a).** Verse 9 beings, "People who want to get rich." For the greedy person, instead of God, it's gold.

You say, "Whew! That rules me out. I don't have any gold. I'm just a hard-working middle class American." But wait. That's not what the text said. It says, "People who *want to* get rich."

The greedy person need not be rich. Verse 9 isn't talking about what you *have*, but what you *want*. The bottom line pursuit of the greedy person is for gold, not God. Money is what governs his life. Career is more important to her than church. He thinks more about overtime than eternity. Her passion is material gain rather than godliness.

Know this...

1. *Having money isn't the issue.*

2. *Having to have it is.* Do you follow? Having money isn't a sin. 1 Samuel 2:7 says, "The LORD sends poverty and wealth." Some of the great men of the Bible were extremely wealthy--like Abraham,

Job, and Solomon. But what made them great was that they lived for God, not gold.

Are you living for gold? You say, "How can I tell?" Here's a good indicator. It's called *giving*. The Bible commands us to give the first part of what we make to God. Why? It's not because God needs our money. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills (Ps. 50:10). So why does He command us to give then? For several reasons, but here's one.

Giving is a revealer. Giving reveals whether we're living for God or gold. It's an act of faith to take the first part of the income God gives to us and give it back to Him. It's a way of saying, "Lord, You mean more to me than the things You've allowed me to have."

2 Corinthians 9:7 puts it this way, "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

Are you experiencing the joy of giving the first part of your income to the Lord? Consistent, cheerful giving is one evidence of godliness. But the opposite is true of greed. For the greedy person, pursuing money is more important than pleasing God. Instead of God, it's gold. Here's a second characteristic...

**B. Instead of freedom, it's a trap (9b).** "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."

A self-absorbed, materialistic life is a trap. What does Paul say happens to people who live for money? They "fall into" some things (and the present tense indicates a continual falling). They fall into temptation, a snare, and into many hurtful desires.

In two other places in the Pastoral epistles, Paul uses the same word "trap," and there it's described as the devil's trap (1 Tim. 3:7; 2 Tim. 2:26). The television commercials tell me that if I get "things" I'll be free to really live. And the credit card companies tell me I don't even have to wait. They'll "give" me the money so I can buy and enjoy *now*.

But my Bible tells me that instead of freedom, the whole thing is what? A trap. It's an enslaving monster. A greedy life leads to two things mentioned at the end of verse 9.

1. *It leads to ruin.* The text states it plunges men "into ruin." Or as the KJV puts it, "Which drown men in destruction." The verb "plunge" means "to sink" or "to drag to the bottom." The pursuit of riches will eventually drown you, even if you never get them.

But that's not all greed will do. Not only is greed a trap that leads to ruin, but...

2. *It leads to eternal destruction.* "Perdition" is the term the KJV translators used. As MacArthur suggests, the terms usually refers to the eternal ruin of the soul (Rom. 9:22; 2 Thes. 2:3; Heb. 10:39).

Put those terms together and you see the total devastation of both body and soul. That's what the love of money does to people--it destroys them.

I used to watch Mickey with amazement. I'd get in the floor and watch him run and run. Mickey was my daughter, Katie's, hamster. He'd hop on that wheel and go round and round for hours. And when he stopped he'd hop off at the same place where he started. I wondered if he ever noticed.

Beloved, a life of greed is a teasing trap. You go like crazy and think you're making progress, but then you stop for a moment and discover that while you may be exhausted, you're still at square one in terms of the kind of life God intends. That's the way greed works. Instead of God, it's gold. Instead of freedom, it's a trap. Thirdly...

**C. Instead of fulfillment, it produces more sin (10).** Verse 10 is one of the most misquoted verses in the Bible. "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil."

There are a couple of misconceptions we need to eliminate off the bat. First, it doesn't say *money* is

the root of evil. It says the *love of money* is.

And secondly, it doesn't say the love of money is *the* root of all evil. It says it's *a* root (there is no definite article in the text). There are other roots of evil besides the love of money. Like bitterness, mentioned in Hebrews 12:15, "See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many."

Having said that, the love of money *is* a root of all kinds of evil. What does that mean? Notice the word *root*. What's a root? It's the unseen part of a plant, the under-the-ground part. That's what the love of money is. It's the unseen root that produces a lot of evil fruit.

By the way, what is *money*? Last Thursday at the baseball owners' meeting, Bud Selig announced that some major league teams lost money in 2009. So what exactly did they lose? What is *money*? It's more than just pieces of paper. According to the Economics Glossary, it's a medium of exchange that facilitates trade.<sup>[2]</sup> It's a tool that enables you to obtain the things this world has to offer.

So if you love money, it's because you love the things you can do with money—the things you can obtain, the experiences you can have—in other words, the things you can exchange money for.

And God's Word says, it's the love of that medium of exchange that's the root of all kinds of evil. Which means other sins have their *root* right here.

James 1:13-15 makes it clear that an act of sin starts with an illicit desire, "Each one is tempted when, by his own evil *desire*, he is dragged away and enticed."

A man commits adultery. The problem isn't just the illicit sex, is it? No, it started with an illicit *desire*.

A homeowner falsifies his tax return. But why? It likewise began with a *desire*. Jesus said, "Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander (Matt. 15:19)."

My friend, are you aware of the desires that are lurking in your heart? Frankly, what keeps some of us from visible sin is merely the fear of getting caught. But the desire is still there. And it drives us. That's yet another reason why we need a Savior, for He alone can set us free from our wicked desires and give us new, God-pleasing desires.

And know this about greed. It doesn't remain alone. It breeds other sins. If you *want things*, it will lead you to do whatever it takes to get them—lie, cheat, neglect your family and church, lower your moral standards—all to *get those things*.

And then what? Paul mentions two outcomes connected with the love of money.

1. *Some wander from the faith.* Verse 10, "Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith." They've left *the* faith, not *their* faith. It could mean they became an apostate. It certainly means their lives were no longer in line with the gospel.

2. *They pierce themselves with many sorrows.* Not just grief, but *many* griefs (as the NIV puts it). Just think what the love of money has caused people to do. In Nathan's parable it caused a man with many flocks and herds to steal one little ewe lamb from a poor man. The love of money caused a rich young ruler to walk away from Jesus and eternal life. It deceived another rich man to build bigger barns and neglect his soul. It caused Judas to betray his master and commit suicide. It led Ananias and Sapphira to lie and lose their lives.

William Hendriksen concludes (201), "The desire for riches...has been the cause of innumerable frauds, dollar-sign marriages, divorces, perjuries, robberies, poisonings, murders, and wars."

I read the story about a rich man who committed suicide. In his pocket they found \$30,000 and a letter which read in part: "I have discovered during my life that piles of money do not bring happiness. I am taking my life because I can no longer stand the solitude and boredom. When I was an ordinary

workman in New York, I was happy. Now that I possess millions I am infinitely sad and prefer death (Hendriksen)."

One of the most challenging things I've read in recent years is a chapter by John Piper, entitled "Money," from his book *Desiring God*. Piper writes:

"Suppose someone passes empty-handed through the turnstiles at a big city art museum and begins to take the pictures off the wall and carry them importantly under his arm. You come up to him and say, 'What are you doing?'

He answers, 'I'm becoming an art collector.'

'But they're not really yours,' you say, 'and besides, they won't let you take any of those out of here. You'll have to go out just like you came in.'

But he answers again, 'Sure, they're mine. I've got them under my arm. People in the halls look at me as an important dealer. And I don't bother myself with thoughts about leaving. Don't be a kill-joy.'

We would call this man a fool! He is out of touch with reality. So is the person who spends himself to get rich in this life. We will go out just the way we came in."<sup>[3]</sup>

Piper's right, isn't he? That's what our text says. We brought nothing in. We take nothing out. Now ponder this illustration, again shared by Pastor Piper:

"Picture 269 people entering eternity in a plane crash in the Sea of Japan. Before the crash there is a noted politician, a millionaire corporate executive, a playboy and his playmate, a missionary kid on the way back from visiting grandparents.

After the crash they stand before God utterly stripped of Mastercards, checkbooks, credit lines, image clothes, how-to-succeed books, and Hilton reservations. Here are the politician, the executive, the playboy, and the missionary kid, all on level ground with nothing, absolutely nothing in their hands, possessing only what they brought in their hearts. How absurd and tragic the lover of money will seem on that day... (162)."

"So what does a pastor say to his people concerning the purchase and ownership of two homes in a world where 2,000 people starve to death every day and mission agencies cannot penetrate more unreached peoples for lack of funds (171)?"

"The issue is not how much a person makes. Big industry and big salaries are a fact of our times, and they are not necessarily evil. The evil is being deceived into thinking a \$100,000 salary must be accompanied by a \$100,000 lifestyle. God made us to be conduits of his grace. The danger is in thinking the conduit should be lined with gold. It shouldn't. Copper will do."

Beloved, God didn't send His Son to this world so we could live *for* this world. He rescued us for something better. When Jesus saves us, it's so we can live for Him, not for self. He shed His blood to pay the penalty for our self-focused living. He conquered death to set us free from our self-focused passions. But we must believe in Him and entrust our lives to Him. Not just a piece of our lives, but the whole thing.

Are you willing? Indeed, there are only two approaches to life: godliness or greed. On which path are you walking?

A Challenge: Let's allow Thanksgiving to turn into Thanks*living* this holiday season.

How can that happen? By doing three things.

1. *Make sure you give thanks to the Giver for His gifts.* Don't just be thankful. Give Him thanks.

Express it. Express it publicly. Men, lead your families in thanking the Giver for His gifts.

2. *Make sure the gifts don't take the place of the Giver in your life.* That's Satan's ploy, to deceive us into living for the things that God has given us (even good things, like family and job), while shelving the One who gave us those good gifts.

3. *Make sure you use the Giver's gifts for His purposes and honor.* Start by being a giver like your heavenly Father. Give Him the first part of your income. And then resolve to use every penny He puts in your care in ways that will please Him.

*After Message:* Read Jesus' parable of the Rich Fool in Luke 12:13-21

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\*\*Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[1] This message has been adapted from a message preached at WBC in 1999 in a series on 1 Timothy.

[2] <http://economics.about.com/cs/studentresources/f/money.htm>

[3] John Piper, p. 161-2.