

Proposition: In 1 Timothy 5:23-6:2, Paul specifies two areas in which we need to live in the light of eternity.

- I. We need to live in light of eternity in our church ministry (5:23-25).
 - A. Take care of your body (23).
 - B. In working with people, remember that you don't see the whole picture (24-25).
 1. It will help you when those who sin "get away with it" (24).
 2. It will encourage you when good deeds go unnoticed (25).
- II. We need to live in light of eternity in our vocational ministry (6:1-2).
 - A. Scenario #1: You may have a bad boss (1).
 1. The goal isn't to get rid of the adversity.
 2. The goal is to make Christ attractive.
 - B. Scenario #2: You may have a believing boss (2).
 1. Don't take advantage of him.
 2. Rather, serve him even better.

Remember: There are three eternal realities...

1. There is a Judge.
2. There will be a judgment.
3. There are only two options.
 - You can take your chance on being good enough.
 - Or, you can abandon your "goodness" in exchange for the goodness of the Son of God.

Let's set the record straight. Life can be hard. That goes for Christians, too. When a person trusts Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord, God does *not* put a bubble over him or her--"There! No more troubles for you!" Not at all.

Christians have car troubles, too, don't they? Christian teens have trouble getting their locker doors open once in a while, too. God's people can get cancer, lose loved ones, have cranky bosses, and disrespectful neighbors, too.

Some of you are feeling the sting of life right now--and it hurts. Yes, life can be hard.

But, we have hope when life is hard. What is that hope? It's what we're going to learn about from God's Word this morning. It's learning to live in light of eternity.

Before us is a text that talks about what to do when life gets hard. The text is 1 Timothy 5:23-6:2. It's a practical text, an encouraging text. It's a timely word from God that calls us to live in light of eternity even when--perhaps *especially* when--life gets hard.

1 Timothy is a *pastoral* epistle. That's because it addresses the subject of pastoral care in churches. This particular letter was written by Paul to Timothy who was giving pastoral care to the church in Ephesus. And both Timothy and the church needed some encouragement. Timothy was facing hardship--and Paul gives him counsel in 5:23-25. And some Christian slaves in the church were facing challenges--so Paul addressed their situation in 6:1-2.

There are tremendous implications here for us, too, as we'll discover in our study. In 1 Timothy 5:23-6:2, Paul specifies two areas in which we need to live in the light of eternity.

I. We need to live in light of eternity in our church ministry (5:23-25).

***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.

A word about context. We've jumped into the middle of a series of instructions that began back in verse 17. Last time, we saw two evidences that a church is taking the Word of God seriously. The first is its attitude towards church leadership, and the second pertains to actions it takes in dealing with church leaders.

Paul told Timothy to make sure the church honored the elders, especially those who work hard in teaching God's Word (17). God has given them delegated authority to lead His church, and the church is to esteem them highly. That esteem includes remuneration (18). It also includes protection (19)--Timothy was to forbid members from taking public pot shots at church leaders (19).

Verse 19 explains that no church member should ever speak out in a business meeting against an elder unless the accusation is substantiated by two or three witnesses. That's consistent with Matthew 18. No church member should accuse *any* fellow believer of sin unless he has first gone to that brother, and then gone again with a witness or two.

What if there is a sin problem? What if a church leader has blown it and has refused to repent at the first appeal and at the appeal of the two or three witnesses? If that's the case, according to verse 20, what is to happen to him? He is to be rebuked publicly by the church. Why? For his good--hopefully it will convince him to repent and be restored, but also, as the text reads, "so that the others may take warning."

It's impossible to have a healthy church and not follow the biblical guidelines concerning church discipline. God will not bless a church that winks at sin in its midst.

So Timothy was to make sure the Ephesian church followed this counsel. According to verse 21, there were to be no exceptions and no partiality. It doesn't matter how gifted a church leader may be, nor how much money he gives, nor how much he's "liked" by the congregation. This standard applies to all.

See the balance? Church leaders deserve respect for they handle the Word of God. But they're also accountable to the same standard they preach, and if they violate it, they must repent, and should they be unwilling, they must be removed.

Since God's standard for church leaders is so high, Timothy was to make sure the church was not "hasty" in putting a man in such a position prematurely. That was Paul's exhortation in verse 22.

If you don't mind me saying so, Timothy had his work cut out for him! Isn't that true? If he followed these instructions, everybody wasn't going to applaud him. It's one thing to teach God's Word in an ivory tower. It's another thing to get into the trenches.

Confrontation is hard. Going to a church member who has been badmouthing a church leader isn't easy--but that's what Timothy had to do. And confronting a sin problem in the life of a church leader isn't easy either--but that, too, was facing Timothy.

Yes, life can be hard! So what should you do when it is? Live in light of eternity. Do what will matter in the light of eternity. Which means what practically? Notice two pieces of counsel Paul gave to Timothy in light of the challenges he faced.

A. Take care of your body (23). "Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses." Some have used this verse as a proof text for social drinking. Is that valid? I don't think so. What was the reason Paul told Timothy to drink a little wine? For *medicinal* purposes--"because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses."

Granted, in my opinion, there is no biblical text that prohibits drinking wine. What the Bible does forbid is drunkenness (Eph. 5:18; Prov. 20:1). But in our culture, my conviction is that wisdom would support abstinence. We live in a society when many

societal problems are linked to alcohol abuse--driving fatalities, child abuse, and spouse abuse, often influenced by alcohol. Even the unregenerate world is talking about the dangers of alcohol. As God's people, we have rights to things we may choose to forfeit in order to achieve the greater goal of reaching people for Christ (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

In another culture, it might be different. For instance, in the Roman world of Paul's day, water was often impure and the carrier of diseases such as dysentery. A little wine would safeguard Timothy's health. The ancient world recognized the medicinal value of wine (as MacArthur observes): "The Talmud, Hippocrates, Pliny, and Plutarch all spoke of the value of wine in countering stomach ailments caused by impure water."

Apparently, Timothy had some chronic health problems of the intestinal sort. I wonder why. He wasn't under any kind of stress, was he? And stress doesn't take a toll on a person physically, does it? Yes, yes.

I'm of the opinion that Timothy had a frail physical constitution to begin with. The Scriptures indicate he was timid (2 Tim. 1:7-8). But as Paul's assistant he was thrust into some precarious situations. He was often given the tough, mop-up assignments--like in Corinth (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10) and now the one in Ephesus.

The text indicates that Timothy had limited his fluid intake to water only. The KJV renders the phrase, "Drink no longer water," but Paul's not telling him to stop drinking water. It's *only* water that's the issue.

Why was Timothy only drinking water? Perhaps he'd been influenced by the ascetics that were plaguing the church. We learned about these teachers in 4:3, "They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth." Had Timothy yielded to the pressure of the ascetics and adopted a water-only policy?

Whatever the reason, Paul's counsel was that Timothy should take a little wine to help with his stomach problems. If he was to keep ministering, he needed to take care of his body.

There's a lesson here for us. Listen to William Barclay's comment, "We dare not neglect the body, for often spiritual dullness and aridity come from the simple fact that the body is tired and neglected. No machine will run well unless it is cared for; and neither will the body. We cannot do Christ's work well unless we are physically fit to do it. There is no virtue--rather the reverse--in neglect of or contempt for the body."

When life gets hard, here's a piece of practical counsel. Make sure you're taking care of your body. In light of the challenges he faced, Timothy needed that reminder. Next, Paul gave him a second piece of counsel.

B. In working with people, remember that you don't see the whole picture (24-25). "The sins of some men are obvious, reaching the place of judgment ahead of them; the sins of others trail behind them. In the same way, good deeds are obvious, and even those that are not cannot be hidden."

Remember, Paul just told Timothy to exercise caution in the ordination of new church leaders (22). Verses 24-25 elaborate by reminding that in the interview process, some flaws of potential leaders will be obvious, and others not so obvious. The same is true of their strengths. You'll see some right up front, while others are not so obvious.

But I think verses 24-25 address something else. Things to check out when selecting leaders--that's one benefit, but Timothy needed something else. And he got it right here.

He needed a personal reminder--when working with people, keep in mind you don't see the whole picture. I think verses 24-25 would have encouraged Timothy greatly.

Why? Because the very nature of ministry is discouraging. In this sense--so much of what a minister does makes little difference if the measure of his life is what he can *see*. For every sinner he restores to God, he may see ten walk away. For every good deed he does that's recognized, a dozen good deeds may go unnoticed. Unnoticed by people, that is, for God notices.

If you take your ministry seriously, you know what I'm talking about. Nobody knows the hours you invest in preparing that Sunday School lesson, or the time you spent on your knees to get your heart ready to sing special music in church. But God does.

"It will be worth it all when we see Jesus. Life's trials will seem so small when we see Christ. One glimpse of His dear face, all sorrow will erase, so bravely run the race till we see Christ!"

Living in the light of eternity means that when you're working with people, you need to remember that you don't see the whole picture. If you keep that perspective, two things will happen.

1. *It will help you when those who sin "get away with it" (24).* "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after," is how the KJV translates verse 24.

There are two types of sin-situations you face in ministry. One, there are *obvious sins*. The pregnant teen, the man whose name appears in the newspaper for writing bad checks, the woman who abandons her husband for another man--those are obvious sins.

But, number two, there are *not so obvious sins* a minister faces. They're the "wet-water melon-seed" sins. The ones that squirt out when you try to pin them down. The lady who undermines the ministry of her deacon by slandering him behind his back. The man who lives a double life, singing in the choir on Sunday and performing shady business deals on Monday. The not so obvious sins that no one knows about.

Ah! But someone does know! He knows about the obvious sins, *and* the not-so-obvious sins, the ones that "trail behind" as Paul puts it verse 24. The judgment is coming. If you remember that it will help you when those who sin seem to "get away with it." Remember that and something else will happen.

2. *It will encourage you when good deeds go unnoticed (25).* "In the same way, good deeds are obvious [KJV, "the good works of some are manifest beforehand"], and even those that are not cannot be hidden."

There are two types of sins--that's what we saw in verse 24. There are also two types of good deeds. First, there are good deeds that people notice--they're "obvious." Then secondly, there are good deeds that people don't notice. But even those deeds *are* noticed. By whom? By God. God notices.

Beloved, we need to remember that we don't see the whole picture. But there is Someone who does. That truth will help you in church ministry. It will bolster you when you see people sin and seem to get away with it. It will encourage you when the good deeds you do go unnoticed.

Take heart, my fellow servants of Christ! If you're living a godly life and taking it on the chin, take heart! "Yes, but my ex-husband took me to the cleaners, and he got away with it." Did he? "I've tried to please God, I've tried to return good for evil, but it goes unnoticed." Does it?

It may seem that way for now. But not in the light of eternity--and eternity is a long, long time.

Peter had some friends who were suffering, and suffering unjustly. Here's the counsel he gave them (1 Pet. 4:12-13, 19): "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange was happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed...So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good."

But Timothy wasn't the only person facing hardship in Ephesus. So were some of the church members, particularly the slaves. They, too, needed a perspective adjustment if they were to endure their challenges in a God-honoring way. From Paul's counsel to them in 6:1-2, we discover a second area in which we need to live in light of eternity.

II. We need to live in light of eternity in our vocational ministry (6:1-2).

The text reads, "All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered. 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. These are the things you are to teach and urge on them."

You may be thinking, "Hold on! This doesn't apply to us. I'm not a slave." No, but once you understand the historical context, I think you'll see tremendous parallels.

In Paul's day, an estimated one-third to over one-half of the population of the Roman Empire were slaves. The Roman world was full of slaves. And so was the church. You could become a slave by being born into slavery, by being captured in war, because of debt, through kidnapping, or in other ways. Barclay says there were 60,000,000 slaves in the Roman Empire.

We need to strip away our preconceived notions of slavery when we read a text like this. Slaves did more than hard field labor under the threat of the whip. Domestic slaves served as managers, cooks, teachers, barbers, butlers, family physicians, and were a part of the household, in some cases, treated almost as family members.

We don't have slaves today in America. But the biblical principles given here apply. Most of us are dependent upon someone else for our income and livelihood. We work for someone, for an employer.

What's your attitude towards your work? Our society does not place a high value on work. According to one survey, 70 percent of Americans do not like their jobs. Of those 70 percent, 90 percent said they did not feel like getting up in the morning to go to work. The average worker views his or her job as a necessary evil. As the bumper sticker puts it, "I Owe, I Owe, So Off to Work I Go."¹

The Bible has much to say about work. We need to rediscover a biblical theology of work. Did you realize that work pre-dates the Fall? Work is a sacred duty. God created mankind to work as Genesis 2:15 explains, "Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden to cultivate and keep it." The Christian is to see every aspect of his life as a way to please God. The Reformers used to stress that point. No one stressed the sacredness of work more than Martin Luther:

"To call popes, bishops, priests, monks, and nuns, the religious class, but princes, lords, artizans [sic], and farm-workers the secular class, is a specious device...For all

¹MacArthur, 227.

Christians whatsoever really and truly belong to the religious class, and there is no difference among them except in so far as they do different work...Hence we deduce that there is, at bottom, really no other difference...between religious and secular, than that of office or occupation, and not that of Christian status."

What Luther's saying is this. Your job matters to God. He gave it to you so you could serve Him there. It is your place of ministry. To think, "Well, I'm not a pastor or a missionary. I'm just a mechanic. I don't have a religious job, just a secular job," is to think in non-biblical categories. God gave you the job you have, and He wants you to honor Him in it.

You say, "How can I honor God if I'm a mechanic? Am I supposed to sing 'Amazing Grace' while I change the oil, or what?" One key way, according to verses 1-2, is to have the right attitude towards your employer.

"That's impossible!" you say. "You don't know my boss!" No, I probably don't, but God does. And in verses 1-2, God's Word presents two scenarios with two different kinds of bosses.

A. Scenario #1: You may have a bad boss (1). "All who are under the yoke of slavery." Notice carefully who Paul is describing. Not just slaves, but slaves "under the yoke." A Christian master wouldn't consider his slaves "under the yoke," but would treat them with love and respect (Col. 4:1; Phile. 16; Wiersbe). I think in verse one Paul's talking to Christian slaves who belonged to non-Christian masters, particularly non-Christian masters who didn't treat them with respect. In that day, in terms of legal status, slaves were little more than cattle (Guthrie).

Verse 2 is going to deal with slaves belonging to Christian masters. But what are you supposed to do if you're a slave who works for an insensitive, unappreciative master? What if you have a boss who takes advantage of you, who thinks only of himself, and who doesn't respect you and your concerns? What are you supposed to do?

Here's the answer. Resolve to live in light of eternity in the way you treat your boss. What does that mean practically? According to verse one, it means to live with the right goal. Stated negatively...

1. *The goal isn't to get rid of the adversity.* That may be impossible. It may be totally out of your control to change the work environment and get rid of the adverse circumstances. But you have a higher, God-given goal...

2. *The goal is to make Christ attractive.* Listen to verse 1 again, this time from the KJV, "Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, *that* [don't miss the purpose clause here!] the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed."

Did you catch that? What is to be the driving issue on our hearts as we respond to a tough work situation? We're supposed to respect our employer, whether he's good or bad, but why? Because something greater than us is at stake. Two things: God's name (the name stamped on our lives--we are "Christ-ians") and our doctrine (teaching).

Why should I respect my boss? Why should I refuse to badmouth and slander him? Why should I not undermine or attack him? Why should I not "get back at him" by doing poor work, even though he's treated me poorly? It's because I don't want to see God's name and God's message slandered. Or in positive terms, the reason is that I want to make Christ attractive through my work.

Ask yourself this question: Do my attitudes and actions on the job make the name of God and the message of Christ attractive? That's the opportunity God has given me even if I have a *bad* boss.

B. Scenario #2: You may have a believing boss (2). That's the group Paul addresses in verse 2, "Those who have believing masters." It happened in the early church, too. The Holy Spirit converted masters. And the Holy Spirit converted slaves, too. And sometimes they were in the same church. Can you see a potential danger here? What if the slave began to think, "Hey, my master is now my brother. Since we're equal, he has no right to tell me what to do!"

Suppose you work for a Christian boss. You worship together on Sunday. You have equal status in Christ. Does your equality mean that on Monday you don't have to obey your Christian boss's instructions? No. Verse 2 explains how to treat a Christian boss.

1. *Don't take advantage of him.* I am not to show less respect for him because he is my brother. Rather, what should I do?

2. *Rather, serve him even better.* Why? "Because those who benefit from their service are believers and dear to them." That is, I should serve my believing boss well because it's in *his* best interest, and that's what we're all about--doing what's best for others.

The point is this. Christianity needs to show up where we *work*. Indeed, it's one of the greatest places we can represent Christ to the world. But we'll do that only if we're living in light of eternity.

Remember: There are three eternal realities...

If we can remember these three eternal realities it will help us as we face hardship in our church ministries and our vocational ministries.

1. *There is a Judge.* What is His name? Jesus--He is the righteous judge (2 Tim. 4:8).

2. *There will be a judgment.* The Judge will make all things right. That person who took advantage of you. That person of whom you took advantage. That boss who mistreated you. And that boss you mistreated at work. The Judge saw all of that. And there will be a judgment. There will be a time of reckoning.

"How can I prepare for that day?" you ask. You must grasp a third reality.

3. *There are only two options.* You can choose one of two options to prepare for the day when you will stand before the Judge in judgment. And the truth is, one of these two options is already true of you.

•You can take your chance on being good enough. The problem with this option is, the Bible says no one is good enough to stand before the Judge. We are sinners (Rom. 3:23). And we have nothing to offer Him that could merit His forgiveness.

The world is full of people opting for option #1. Perhaps you are. I invite you today to admit the folly of option #1, and accept God's offer in option #2. You can take your chance on being good enough...

•Or, you can abandon your "goodness" in exchange for the goodness of the Son of God. Jesus lived a perfect life, then sacrificed that life as a payment for the sins of all who would believe on Him. Have you? If not, will you? There is no other option.

It's either take your chance on being good enough, *or* admit you're not and trust in the only One who is, Jesus, the crucified, risen Savior. That's the beginning of living in the light of eternity.