

Eternal Wealth

1 Timothy 6:17-19

September 18, 2011

We have come to the third of four sermons this year about giving. God has quite a bit to say about our money and about how we support the work of the church and each other. At its most basic, money is a tool given us by God to use for His glory and the benefit of His church and His people. We are not to place more value on it than we ought, certainly not more value than we place on God. We are not to trust our money more than we trust our Creator. We are not to hoard money, though we are to plan for the future and be wise. To provide for ourselves and our families is a good thing. Beyond that, money becomes a trap.

This is part of the point Paul is making as he writes to Timothy. Timothy was Paul's son in the faith. Paul taught Timothy and grew in him the faith that had been instilled by Timothy's mother and grandmother. As Timothy grew in his faith and the grace of God, Paul groomed him to pastor among the churches Paul was founding. Timothy ended up pastoring in Ephesus. The two letters that bear his name were written by Paul to encourage and instruct Timothy as he led the Ephesian Christians. That is the larger context from which this morning's text comes.

Earlier in the letter Paul had addressed the issue of certain people in the church who wanted money and so sought to manipulate the church for their own financial gain. These people taught things that were not true because they believed those who heard them would give more as a result. Unfortunately, we still see the same thing today as radio and television preachers too often twist God's word or claim special revelation in an attempt to get their hearers to send more money. Paul said these people are conceited and understand nothing. In response Paul said:

“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. 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. 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.” 1 Timothy 6:6-10

Paul told Timothy to be content with what God provides. We are all to work hard to provide for ourselves and our families, and to be content with what God has given. Wanting to get rich is a trap both for those who succeed and those who do not. It is not money that is the problem, it is the **love** of money that is a root for all kinds of evil. The key is to wisely use all the resources God has given us, especially money.

With that behind him, Paul went on to instruct Timothy on how to instruct and lead the church. Again, that is what the whole letter is about. As Paul drew near the end, indeed the last thing he tells Timothy to do in regard to teaching and instructing the church, we find this morning's text.

The first thing we note is that Paul expected Timothy to have **authority** in the church. Timothy was not to encourage, suggest, or ask the rich under his care. He was to command them. This is true throughout the letter. The leaders of God's people are not to lord it over them, seek more authority than they have, or abuse or misuse their authority. By the same token the church is commanded to obey her leaders as they teach, lead, and guide according to God's word. What is taught must be measured against God's word. That which passes the test is to be followed.

Paul told Timothy, “*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.*” (v.17) Paul’s final instruction is to be passed through Timothy to those in the church who had financial means. The instruction is to Timothy, but it is for those who are rich in this present world. It is a four-part instruction for those who have resources they can share with others.

The first instruction is to not be **arrogant**. It is easy for those who have to look down on those who have not. We are each given different resources. We are all of equal value before God, but that does not mean we are all given the same earthly resources. God knows what He wants to do in and with us. He also knows what He wants to do through us. He will give us the resources we need and He will withhold the resources that would get in the way. He will encourage us to work. He will remind us that all we have is by and for His grace and pleasure. If you have nothing, work hard and trust God to provide. This morning’s text is for those who have much. They are not to be arrogant as if what they have is only the result of their hard work and wisdom. The grace of God is also responsible for their good fortune. Tomorrow it could all be gone.

In today’s financial climate, with all the fluctuations we are seeing in the stock market, with companies going bankrupt and others leaving industries they have led, this is much easier to believe. Money does not provide security. It may help us relax from a worldly perspective, but it is not secure or sure.

This leads us to the second of Paul’s instructions to those who are rich. The second instruction is to not put our **hope** in wealth. Even in Paul’s day wealth was uncertain. You could be robbed. A fire could rage through the city and you could lose all you owned. Then, as now, almost anything could happen and you

would be powerless to stop your money from going away. The wealth of this world is fleeting. It is not where we are to put our hope.

Instead, we are to put our hope in God. It is God who provides us what we need. It is His gracious hand that gives us rain, air, food, and all the other things necessary for life. Even more He gives us sunshine, flowers, flowing streams, each other, and so much more (including Himself) so that we might not only live, but enjoy life. All things exist for Him and for His glory, but it is to His glory that He made us to enjoy His creation as well. He gives us things to help us enjoy life. We are to place our faith and hope in Him as the one Who will provide us with what we need. Jesus said we are not to worry about what we will eat or what we will wear. He said, “*But seek first [your heavenly Father’s] kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*” (Matthew 6:33) We don’t seek wealth to put our faith in it. We seek God and put our faith in Him. We trust Him to take care of the rest. We work hard for His glory. We enjoy the fruit of our labor that He grants to us.

So, if we have money we are not to be arrogant and we are not to put our hope in our money. Instead we are to humbly accept what we have as a gift from God and we are to put our hope in Him. Paul went on. “*Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.*” (v.18) In these four phrases we have two more commands.

Paul’s next instruction to the rich is that they do **good**. We are to be rich in good deeds. As Paul pointed out earlier in the chapter, we came into this world with nothing and we are going to leave behind everything of worldly value. All we get to take with us is the ways in which we used our resources to help each other and those around us. When all is said and done it is the kind of person you were and not how much you left in the bank that will matter. We are to be known more for

helping, supporting, and loving each other than for the size of our houses or the kinds of cars we drive. The trappings of wealth are a trap, as we have said. If we help others we exhibit the mind and love of God. We also have the benefit of having friends. Money is fleeting, but good deeds endure.

This may be one of the reasons Jesus does not condemn the servant in His parable of the shrewd manager. You remember. A manager learned he was about to lose his job and he didn't know how to do anything else, so he conspired with those who owed his boss money to decrease their bills. This way he figured they would help him until he got a new job. The boss, instead of dragging the guy to court, commended him for thinking ahead and showing some initiative. Jesus told the story and then said, *"I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings."* (Luke 16:9) Now, it's a sin to lie and to change records in order to defraud your employer for your own benefit. I am not recommending anybody do that. Still, Jesus and Paul are both clear that our relationships with others are far more important than our finances. We are to be obedient to God with all that He gives us, and that especially includes our money. We are to be rich in good deeds.

Finally, Paul's last instruction to the church through Timothy was to the rich that they be generous and willing to share. We are to be **generous**. If we really understand the importance of our relationships and the unimportance of our money, then we will be generous with those in need. We are not to be foolish and give money to those who will misuse it to their own harm. We are to loving which means that we discern when giving someone money will bring them more harm than good. Still, we are to be generous people. We must be willing to share with others the resources God has given us.

One of the ways we do this is through the church. God has called us together out of the world to be His people. He has organized us into a family that bears His name and serves one another and those around us in that name. Our heavenly Father has poured out His blessings on us. We are to share those blessings and not hoard them.

As the church we pool our resources in order to carry this out. We collect an offering every Sunday in order to raise the funds we need to maintain this facility as a base of operations, to provide the equipment we need to carry out our mission, to keep the utilities on so we can keep the lines of communication open, and to pay staff to help organize, teach, and lead our mission. These things are essential as we seek to carry out the mission God has given us. Those of us in the congregation who have been given resources by God must share them with the rest of the congregation in order for the ministry of this church to be carried out. We have a responsibility to God to contribute to the **work** of this church, both through giving our time and energy to help do the work, and giving our money to help provide the tools and teaching we need to carry out the work.

If we identify with this congregation this responsibility is ours whether or not we are here. When members are absent from this body we are still responsible to provide for the work that is being done in our absence. If we will be gone for a time we need to give our money before we go, arrange to give while we are gone, or catch up when we get back. It is good to go away and enjoy the world in which God has placed us, but if we identify with this congregation, we have a responsibility to continue to contribute to the work of the ministry that takes place while we are gone.

Thankfully God's commands come with God's promises, and Paul finishes his commands to the church with the promise that comes with putting our hope in

God and being generous. *“In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.”* (v.19) If we are generous we will lay up treasure in heaven. Here, again, Paul is simply echoing what Jesus had already said. As we do good and are generous we lay up eternal wealth that cannot be stolen or destroyed. As we follow our Lord in giving to others as He has given to us, we build on the foundation He has laid. **God’s** generosity and grace are the foundation for our eternal lives, and our generosity and grace reflect His. As we live like our Lord, we take hold of the life that He has given us. As we put our hope in Him, letting go of the things of this world, we find out what Jesus meant when He said He came so that we might have abundant life. As we live in God we come to know what true life is and is all about. As we let go of this world, we take hold of the life that will take us to the next.

Money is not bad. It is not evil. It is simply a tool humanity has created to help get things done. We need to use ours, together, to do good, and to lay up riches in heaven. As we seek God’s direction for this congregation, let us make certain we also give enough to carry out the mission and the ministry He gives us. In so doing we will lay up eternal wealth.