

Introduction to 1 Timothy Chapter 6

Godliness with Contentment, the Good Fight, and the Charge to the Wealthy: The Letter's Final Word

First Timothy chapter 6 is the letter's final chapter — and it brings together, in a remarkable concentration of pastoral urgency, the letter's three great concerns: the danger of false teaching, the formation of the individual minister, and the ordering of the community's common life. The chapter opens with a brief word about those in positions of social subordination, moves quickly to a devastating portrait of the false teacher motivated by financial gain, delivers the letter's most personal and most exhilarating charge to Timothy himself, and then closes with two carefully calibrated instructions about wealth — one for the wealthy in the present age, and one final charge to Timothy to guard what has been entrusted to him.

The section on false teachers and money in verses 3-10 is among the most penetrating in the entire letter. Paul identifies a specific and particularly dangerous form of false teaching: the teaching that is motivated by financial gain, that treats godliness as a means to financial profit. The portrait he draws is comprehensive and uncomfortable — the false teacher described is not someone who has abandoned all pretense of spirituality, but someone who deploys the forms and the vocabulary of religion as a mechanism for personal enrichment, all while generating the same theological controversy that chapter 1 identified as the primary symptom of false teaching. And the counter-claim Paul makes is the letter's most memorable: godliness with contentment is great gain. The word great here is the same word used in 3:16's description of the mystery of godliness as great. The genuine gain that the genuine godliness produces is not financial. It is the contentment that belongs to the person who has learned to hold the things of this world loosely because they have their hands on something of infinitely greater value.

The personal charge to Timothy in verses 11-16 is the emotional and spiritual high point of the chapter — and perhaps of the entire letter. Flee the love of money, Timothy is told — but immediately the instruction turns from what to flee toward what to pursue: righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. And then: fight the good fight of the faith. The same fight-language that chapter 1's closing used — the good fight, the keeping of faith and conscience — returns here, now grounded in the most theologically comprehensive account of the gospel's content in the letter. The charge to Timothy is issued in the sight of God who gives life to everything and of Christ Jesus who gave his good testimony before Pontius Pilate — the Creator God and the crucified Christ both invoked as the witnesses before whom the fight is being waged. And the doxology that follows — ascribing to God alone the immortality, the unapproachable light, the honor and power — is the letter's closest equivalent to the erupting praise of 1:17.

The chapter closes, after the instruction to the wealthy, with the most urgent possible final charge to Timothy: guard what has been entrusted to your care. The deposit — the word used elsewhere in the Pastoral Epistles (2 Timothy 1:14) for the body of teaching that has been committed to the minister's keeping — is the thing that Timothy has been commissioned to protect from the false teachers since chapter 1. And the letter's final word — grace be with you all — is the same grace that was the first word of the letter and the first and last word of the Thessalonian correspondence. The letter that began with grace ends with grace. Everything in between — the false teachers, the ordering of worship, the qualification lists, the widows, the elders, the contentment, the fight — all of it exists within the frame of the grace that is the source, the sustenance, and the final word of everything the community of faith does and is.

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We come to the final chapter of 1 Timothy asking for the dual gift this chapter offers: the contentment that makes the love of money unnecessary, and the fight that makes the pursuit of righteousness possible. Give us godliness with contentment — the understanding that we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it, and that having food and clothing we should be content. Let this not be a counsel of diminishment but of liberation: the person who is genuinely content has been freed from the grip of the thing that grips most tightly in every generation.

And give us the fight of faith that the chapter commends: not the combative, controversy-generating fight of chapter 1's false teachers, but the fight toward righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness — the fight whose goal is the character of the God we serve. Let the great commission of verse 12 — take hold of the eternal life to which you were called — be the aspiration that organizes our days, and let the sight of God who gives life to everything and of Christ Jesus who gave his good confession before Pontius Pilate be the context in which we wage it.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

1 Timothy 6:1–2

Those Under the Yoke: The Gospel's Witness in Circumstances of Social Subordination

(1) 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.

(2) Those who have believing masters should not show them disrespect just because they are fellow believers. Instead, they should serve them even better, because those who benefit from their service are dear to them as fellow believers and are devoted to the welfare

of those who serve them. These are the things you are to teach and insist on.

THE CONTEXT

The brief opening instruction of the chapter — addressed to those under the yoke of slavery — is one of the most contextually sensitive passages in the letter, and one that requires honest engagement with both its historical context and its theological logic. The institution of slavery in the first-century Roman world was an inescapable social reality, embedded in the legal, economic, and domestic structures of society in ways that no individual's decision or even a community's collective decision could simply override. Paul's instructions here are not an endorsement of slavery as a social institution — the same Paul who writes Galatians 3:28 (neither slave nor free in Christ), who sends Onesimus back to Philemon with a letter that makes his slave status theologically untenable, and who uses slavery as a metaphor for the bondage from which the gospel liberates, is not a defender of the system.

What Paul is addressing is the specific pastoral and missiological concern that animated similar instructions elsewhere in the Pastoral Epistles (Titus 2:9-10) and in the broader Pauline corpus: the witness of the gospel in circumstances of social subordination that cannot be immediately changed. The instruction — consider masters worthy of full respect, so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered — applies the same logic that the entire letter has been applying to every form of community ordering: the primary concern is the credibility of the gospel in the eyes of those who are watching the community. The believing slave who treats a non-believing master with contempt, or who uses the equality of the gospel as a pretext for social insubordination, has given the watching world a reason to say that the gospel is socially destabilizing rather than genuinely transformative.

The second verse adds the further complication of the believing master — the situation in which both parties to the slave relationship are members of the community of faith. The temptation might be to use the fellowship of the faith as a reason for diminished service — we are brothers and sisters now; why should I serve you as a slave? Paul's instruction addresses this precisely: serve them even better, because the benefit of the service goes to a fellow believer who is devoted to the welfare of the one who serves. The gospel's logic does not reduce obligation — it intensifies it. The same logic that makes all believers equal before God makes every act of service an act directed toward a person who is now, in the deepest possible sense, a neighbor.

PLAIN AMERICAN ENGLISH

Everyone who is a slave should treat their masters with full respect, so that God's name and our teaching won't be spoken of with contempt. If any slaves

have masters who are believers, they shouldn't treat them with less respect just because they're fellow Christians. They should actually serve them even better, because the ones benefiting from their work are beloved fellow believers who care about their wellbeing. These are the things you should be teaching and insisting on.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

"So that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered": This signifies **The Motivation for the Instruction Is Missiological — the Credibility of the Gospel in the Eyes of Those Who Are Watching the Community.**

The same missiological motivation that runs through the entire letter's ordering instructions — from the prayer for kings so that the community may live peacefully and so advance the gospel, to the qualification of elders that includes a good reputation with outsiders — appears here in its most direct form. The instruction is not primarily about maintaining social order or respecting the institution of slavery. It is about the witness that the community's behavior in the existing social order provides to those who are evaluating whether the gospel is what it claims to be. The community that the gospel is forming is being watched — and its behavior in the most socially exposed dimensions of its life is the most visible testimony available to the God whose name is at stake.

"Serve them even better, because those who benefit from their service are dear to them as fellow believers": This signifies **The Gospel Does Not Reduce the Obligation of Service but Intensifies It by Transforming the Relationship Within Which the Service Occurs.**

The instruction to serve believing masters even better is counterintuitive — the gospel's announcement of equality before God might be expected to reduce the felt obligation of service, or at least to make it more perfunctory. Paul's logic runs in the opposite direction: the master who is now a fellow believer, who is dear to the serving person, who is devoted to their welfare — this master is a neighbor in the fullest possible gospel sense. And the obligation to love the neighbor is not reduced by the neighbor's elevated social position. If anything, the intensification of the relationship through the shared faith makes the service an act of love rather than merely an act of compulsion.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR US TODAY

1. Read Paul's Instructions About Social Subordination Within Their Full Pastoral and Missiological Context Before Drawing Broader Conclusions:

The instructions in verses 1-2 are not a general social theory but a specific pastoral word addressed to people in circumstances of social subordination that they could not immediately change, whose primary concern was the credibility of the gospel to those watching them. The church that reads these instructions as an endorsement of any system of social subordination, or as a permanent theological principle about the appropriate relationship between powerful and powerless people, has misread both the letter's immediate concern and the larger Pauline corpus's consistent trajectory — toward freedom, equality, and the subversion of social hierarchies by the social logic of the gospel.

2. Let the Missiological Concern for God's Name Be the Primary Lens for Evaluating the Community's Behavior in Every Social Context: The instruction that the community's behavior in social contexts should not slander God's name or teaching is not limited to the specific context of slavery. It is the broadest possible expression of the letter's consistent concern: the watching world is evaluating the gospel by the behavior of the people who claim to be formed by it. In every social context — the workplace, the neighborhood, the civic community, the family — the question the community should be asking is not merely what is permissible for us but what does our behavior communicate about the God whose name we carry and the teaching whose credibility we represent.

HOW THIS RELATES TO TODAY

The instructions of verses 1-2, taken in their full context, illustrate one of the most important principles of the letter: that the gospel's transformation of the community's interior life does not always translate immediately or directly into the transformation of the community's external social structures. The community formed by the gospel may live within social structures that the gospel's full logic would eventually transform or abolish — but the transformation is not always immediate, and the behavior of the community within the existing structures is itself a form of witness, for good or ill. The church has always been called to embody the gospel's social logic within whatever structures it inhabits — while also, over time and through the slow leaven of the kingdom, pressing toward the fuller expression of that logic that the gospel's ultimate trajectory describes.

Key Lesson: *The instruction about those under the yoke of slavery is governed entirely by the missiological concern for God's name and teaching — the gospel's transformation does not always immediately change the social structures within which the community lives, but it does transform the motivation, the quality, and the relational character of the service rendered within those structures, and the watching world is always evaluating whether the community's behavior matches the gospel's claims.*

1 Timothy 6:3–10

False Teaching, Financial Gain, and Godliness with Contentment: The Great Gain That Money Cannot Buy

(3) *If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching,*
(4) *they are conceited and understand nothing. They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions*
(5) *and constant friction between people of corrupt mind and deprived of the truth,*
who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

(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.
(9) Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people 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.

THE CONTEXT

The passage moves from the brief word about social subordination into the most sustained treatment in the chapter of the false teacher — and this time the portrait is more specific than what chapter 1 offered. The false teacher of chapter 1 was characterized primarily by the theological controversy he generated. The false teacher of chapter 6 is characterized by something more interior and more dangerous: the use of religion as a financial strategy. They think that godliness is a means to financial gain. This is not merely the accusation of hypocrisy — the pretending to be godly while secretly pursuing wealth. It is the deeper corruption of a theology that has genuinely come to believe that the appearance of godliness is one of the most effective instruments available for the accumulation of financial advantage.

The portrait of the false teacher in verses 4-5 builds with a familiar accumulation of symptoms: conceited and understanding nothing, an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words, envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions, constant friction between people of corrupt mind and deprived of the truth. Every symptom points to the interior corruption that chapter 1 identified as the departure from pure heart, good conscience, and sincere faith. The quarrels and the controversies are not the disease. They are the symptoms of a mind that is corrupt and a truth that has been departed from — and money is, in this case, the specific corruption that has produced the specific departure.

Against this background, verse 6's counter-claim arrives with the force of a thesis: godliness with contentment is great gain. The word great is the same word applied to the mystery of godliness in 3:16 — the six-line hymn about the incarnate, vindicated, proclaimed, and glorified Christ. The genuine gain that genuine godliness produces is not financial. It is the contentment that belongs to the person who has received the mystery of godliness and who, having received it, finds that the things the false teacher is chasing cannot compete with what they already have. The contentment of verse 6 is not the contentment of diminished desire. It is the contentment of satisfied desire — the person who has the thing worth wanting and no longer experiences the compulsive pull of the things that were substituting for it.

PLAIN AMERICAN ENGLISH

If someone teaches something different and won't agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that leads to godliness — that person is arrogant and doesn't actually understand anything. They have a sick obsession with controversies and arguments about words, which produces envy, fighting, slander, evil suspicions, and constant quarreling among people

whose minds have been corrupted and who have been robbed of the truth. These are people who think religion is a way to get rich. But godliness combined with contentment is an enormous benefit. After all, we brought nothing into this world, and we can't take anything out of it. If we have food and clothing, we should be satisfied with that. But people who are determined to be rich fall into temptation and get caught in a trap — pulled into all kinds of foolish and harmful desires that drag people down into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. By craving it, some people have wandered away from the faith and impaled themselves on a lot of pain.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

"They think that godliness is a means to financial gain": This signifies **The Most Dangerous Form of the Love of Money in a Religious Context Is Not the Abandonment of Godliness but Its Instrumentalization — Using the Appearance of Religion to Acquire Wealth.**

The corruption Paul describes in verse 5 is subtler and more dangerous than simple financial greed. The false teacher who has departed from sound doctrine in pursuit of money is a recognizable figure — they use a theological controversy to generate a following, and a following to generate financial support, and the theological controversy itself becomes less important than its revenue-generating capacity. This is not the corruption of someone who has abandoned religion for money. It is the corruption of someone who has made religion into money — who has discovered that the forms of godliness, deployed with sufficient skill, are extraordinarily effective instruments for the accumulation of financial advantage. The seared conscience of 4:2 makes this sustainable: the person who has suppressed the mechanism that would register the discrepancy between stated conviction and actual motivation can maintain the performance indefinitely.

"Godliness with contentment is great gain — for we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it": This signifies **The Theological Grounding of Contentment Is the Most Radical Available Reframing of the Relationship Between the Person and Their Possessions.**

The argument of verses 6-7 is simultaneously simple and devastating to the false teacher's financial strategy. Godliness with contentment is great gain — not because contentment is a pleasant personality trait, but because the person who has it has the only genuinely satisfying form of wealth available: the satisfaction of wanting what they have rather than having what they want. And the grounding of contentment in the brought nothing in / can take nothing out reality is the most radical available reframing of the relationship between the person and their possessions: every material thing the person has is temporary, contingent, and ultimately non-transferable. The only things that accompany a person through death — the only genuinely portable assets — are the things that godliness produces: the character formed by the gospel, the relationship with the God who is the source of all genuine good, and the name written in the book.

"The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil": This signifies **The Love of Money Is Not Simply One Vice Among Many but a Root That Generates the Full Range of Corruptions That the Preceding Verses Have Described.**

The famous verse 10 is regularly misquoted as money is the root of all evil — and the misquotation matters, because the actual statement is both more specific and more comprehensive than the misquotation. The love of money — not money itself, which is morally neutral, but the disordered attachment to it, the love that places financial gain in the position that the love of God and the love of neighbor are supposed to occupy — is a root of all kinds of evil. The root metaphor specifies causation: the love of money is not one evil among others but the generative source from which other evils grow. The symptoms described in verses 4-5 — envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions, constant friction, corrupt mind, departure from truth — are all fruits of this root. The tree is the love of money; the fruits are everything that tree produces in the person and the community it has infected.

"Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs": This signifies **The Departure from Faith Produced by the Love of Money Is Not Only Spiritual Loss but Personal Pain — Those Who Pierce Themselves with Money's Griefs Do Not Find What They Were Looking For.**

The image of verse 10's close — pierced themselves with many griefs — is one of the most memorable in the letter. It is not the image of someone who pursued money successfully and found it empty at the destination. It is the image of someone who, in the very pursuit, was wounded by the instrument of the pursuit — as if the sword they were chasing pierced them before they could grasp its handle. The griefs are not the griefs of having arrived and been disappointed. They are the griefs that the wandering itself produces: the relationships damaged, the conscience further suppressed, the theological commitments abandoned, the trust betrayed, and the community harmed — all in the process of the pursuit, long before any destination was reached.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR US TODAY

1. Identify the Love of Money in Its Most Religious Forms — Where Financial Gain Motivates Theological Positions, Ministry Strategies, or Spiritual Performance: The corruption Paul describes in verses 3-5 is as recognizable in the contemporary church as it was in the first-century Ephesian community. The ministry that develops theological positions in proportion to their revenue-generating capacity, that adjusts its message in response to the financial preferences of its largest donors, that cultivates the appearance of spiritual authority as a mechanism for financial support — this is the form of the love of money that is most difficult to identify and most damaging when present, because it wears the clothes of genuine ministry. Ask of every ministry context: are the theological positions and ministry strategies being generated by the love of truth, or by the love of the financial advantage that certain positions and strategies provide?

2. Cultivate the Contentment That Makes the Love of Money Unnecessary — Receiving It as the Great Gain the Letter Describes: Godliness with contentment is great gain — and the cultivation of that contentment is one of the most countercultural spiritual practices available in any generation, but especially in a generation saturated with the message that more is always better and enough is never enough. The practical cultivation of contentment begins with the theological grounding

of verses 7-8: the honest acknowledgment that everything material is temporary and non-transferable, and that food and clothing — the basics of physical existence — are the minimum necessary to sustain the life in which the genuinely valuable things are being accumulated. Live below your means. Hold material possessions loosely. Receive the contentment as the great gain it is — because the person who has it is free from the compulsion that the love of money generates in everyone who has not yet found the thing that satisfies.

3. Recognize the Love of Money as a Root Rather Than a Fruit — Address It at the Level of the Desire Rather Than the Level of the Symptom: The advice to manage the symptoms of the love of money — the envy, the strife, the malicious talk — without addressing the root desire that generates them is the advice that produces at best temporary improvement and at worst more sophisticated concealment of the underlying problem. The root must be addressed at the level of the root: the desire for financial gain that has been elevated above the love of God and the love of neighbor, the attachment to material wealth that has displaced the attachment to the genuinely portable assets of godliness. Pray against the root. Identify it honestly when it is present. Do not be satisfied with managing its symptoms.

HOW THIS RELATES TO TODAY

The passage's description of false teachers who think godliness is a means to financial gain is one of the most directly applicable to the contemporary religious landscape — where the prosperity gospel, in its various forms, represents exactly the theological position this passage describes as the product of a corrupt mind and a departure from truth. The prosperity gospel's claim that financial blessing is the evidence and the reward of genuine faith, that poverty reflects insufficient faith, and that the generous giving expected of believers should be understood in part as an investment with financial returns — this is not a post-Enlightenment innovation. It is the first-century Ephesian heresy in contemporary dress, and 1 Timothy 6:5 identifies it with precision: who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

The counter-claim of verse 6 — godliness with contentment is great gain — is therefore not merely a preference for modest living over lavish living. It is a comprehensive theological refutation of the prosperity gospel's underlying premise: that the measure of genuine spiritual success is financial. The genuine measure of genuine spiritual success is godliness — character formed by the gospel, expressed in the love that chapter 1 identified as the goal of the command, maintained in the fight that verse 12 will describe. And the contentment that accompanies this godliness is the evidence of its genuineness — because the person who is genuinely content does not need the financial validation that the prosperity gospel promises.

Key Lesson: *Godliness with contentment is great gain — the most devastating possible counter to the false teacher's claim that religion is a path to financial profit, grounded in the most radical possible reframing of the relationship between the person and their possessions: we brought nothing in and can take nothing out, so food and clothing are enough, and the love of money that seeks more than this is a root that generates every evil the passage has described and pierces those who pursue it with the very griefs they were fleeing from.*

1 Timothy 6:11–16

The Man of God: Flee, Pursue, Fight, Take Hold — and the Doxology That Grounds It All

(11) But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.
(12) Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.
(13) In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you
(14) to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ,
(15) which God will bring about in his own time— God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords,
(16) who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.

THE CONTEXT

The pivot of verse 11 — but you, man of God — is one of the most personal and most galvanizing moments in the letter. Everything that has just been described — the false teacher, the love of money, the wandering from faith, the piercings of grief — is placed on one side, and Timothy is placed firmly on the other: but you. The title man of God is drawn from the Old Testament's use of the same phrase for Moses (Deuteronomy 33:1), Samuel (1 Samuel 9:6), Elijah (1 Kings 17:18), and Elisha (2 Kings 4:7) — figures who stood in specific, costly, high-stakes service to the God they were named after. The title is not merely an honorific. It is a description of identity that carries its own implied obligation: the man of God is the one whose life corresponds to whose man he is.

The instructions that follow have a fourfold structure that mirrors the structure of chapter 4's charge in miniature: flee, pursue, fight, take hold. Flee from all this — from the love of money, the false teaching, the controversies that generate nothing but grief. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness — the six virtues that collectively describe the character that the gospel is supposed to produce in the person who has genuinely received it. Fight the good fight of the faith — the same fight-language of 1:18-20, now grounded in the most theologically comprehensive account in the letter of what the fight is for: eternal life, the life to which you were called, the life to which the good confession Timothy made before many witnesses was the public entry point. Take hold of the eternal life — not wait for it, not aspire to it, not hope for it eventually, but take hold of it now, as the already-given, already-real reality that the fight is being waged in defense of.

The charge of verse 13 is issued before the most solemn witnesses available: God who gives life to everything, and Christ Jesus who made the good confession before Pontius Pilate. The Creator God — whose life-giving character is the ground of every claim the gospel makes about life's ultimate significance — and the crucified Christ — whose own good confession before the most powerful Roman authority available ended not in acquittal but in crucifixion — are both invoked as the witnesses before whom the charge is given and before whom it must be kept. The parallel between Timothy's good confession before many witnesses and Christ's good confession before Pontius Pilate is the chapter's most searching and most encouraging comparison: the same kind of confession, made at the same kind of cost, before the same kind of watching world.

The doxology of verses 15-16 is the letter's closest equivalent to the eruption of praise in 1:17 — and it arrives, as that earlier doxology did, at the moment when the weight of the theological content has built to a point where the only appropriate response is worship. God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see — to him be honor and might forever. The language gathers together the description of God from across the letter — the one God, the Savior, the only sovereign — and expresses it in the vocabulary of transcendence that the letter's earlier doxology of 1:17 began: the eternal, the immortal, the invisible. The fight is fought before this God. The confession is made before this God. And the doxology that erupts in response to this God is the most fitting possible interruption in the middle of a practical charge to a young minister in a troubled community.

PLAIN AMERICAN ENGLISH

But you, man of God — run from all that. Instead, pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life you were called to when you made your good confession in front of all those witnesses. I charge you, in the presence of God — who gives life to all things — and of Christ Jesus — who gave his good confession before Pontius Pilate — to keep this command completely, without fault, until our Lord Jesus Christ appears. That appearing, God will bring about at the right time — God, the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. He alone is immortal; He lives in unapproachable light. No one has seen Him, and no one can. To Him be honor and eternal power. Amen.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

"But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue": This signifies **The Pivot from Description of the False Teacher to Personal Charge to Timothy Is the Letter's Most Personal and Most Galvanizing Moment — the Title Implies an Identity That Carries Its Own Obligation.**

The but you that opens verse 11 is the same rhetorical pivot that Paul uses in Galatians 1:8-9 and 2 Thessalonians 2:13 to turn from the description of a corrupted condition to the declaration of an alternative identity. You are not that. You are this. The title man of God carries the full weight of the Old Testament's use of the phrase for the prophetic figures who stood in costly, high-stakes service to the God whose name they bore — and it places Timothy in that lineage, not as an exaggeration of his status but as a description

of his calling. The man whose identity is defined by whose man he is cannot simultaneously be pursuing what the false teacher pursues. The identity itself generates the obligation to flee what is incompatible with it.

"Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called": This signifies **The Fight Is Not Primarily Against an External Enemy but Toward an Internal Reality — the Eternal Life That Has Already Been Given Must Be Actively Grasped.**

The imagery of the good fight is not primarily the imagery of combat against external enemies — false teachers, opponents, theological adversaries. It is the imagery of the athletic struggle that chapter 4's training-for-godliness passage introduced: the sustained, disciplined effort that the genuinely valuable requires. And the object of the fight is specified: the eternal life to which you were called. The fight is the fight to hold, to pursue, to take hold of the life that the good confession entered into — the eternal life that is not merely a future hope but the present reality that the fight is being waged to maintain and to deepen. Take hold of it — the Greek suggests grasping firmly, as one grasps something that might be lost if not actively held.

"In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession": This signifies **The Two Witnesses Before Whom the Charge Is Given Are the Creator God and the Crucified Christ — and the Parallel Between Timothy's Confession and Christ's Is the Letter's Most Searching Comparison.**

The identification of Christ Jesus as the one who made the good confession before Pontius Pilate is remarkable for what it does not say: it does not say that Christ's confession resulted in his acquittal, his vindication, or his escape from the consequences that followed. Jesus made the good confession before Pontius Pilate — and was crucified. The parallel between Timothy's good confession before many witnesses and Christ's good confession before the governor is therefore not the promise that the good confession will always produce favorable outcomes in the world's terms. It is the promise that the good confession is the right response to the situation in which it must be made, regardless of the outcome — and that the God who witnessed Christ's good confession before Pontius Pilate is the same God who witnesses Timothy's.

"God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal — to him be honor and might forever": This signifies **The Doxology That Erupts in Response to the Charge Is the Most Transcendent Description of God in the Letter — and Its Eruption in the Middle of Practical Instruction Is Itself a Theological Statement.**

The doxology of verses 15-16 is not a decorative addition to a practical charge. It is the theological weight that gives the practical charge its ultimate significance. The fight that Timothy is being charged to fight — and by extension, the fight that every believer fights in every generation — is fought before the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal, who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. The transcendence of this God is not a distant abstraction. It is the specific, overwhelming, worship-generating reality that contextualizes every practical instruction the letter has given — and to which the only appropriate response, even in the middle of charging a

young minister about false teachers and the love of money, is: to him be honor and might forever. Amen.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR US TODAY

1. Receive the Title Man or Woman of God as a Description of Identity That Carries Its Own Imperative for What Must Be Fled and What Must Be Pursued:

The title man of God in verse 11 is not merely an honorific addressed to Timothy in his specific ministerial role. It is the description of the identity that every person who belongs to the God of this letter bears — an identity that implies both the fleeing that the identity makes necessary (all that is incompatible with whose person you are) and the pursuit that the identity makes possible (righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness). The person who has received the gospel of the God whose name they now bear has been given an identity that reorganizes every other priority: flee what belongs to the other story; pursue what belongs to this one.

2. Let the Fight Be a Fight Toward the Eternal Life That Has Already Been Given — Grasping What Is Already Yours Rather Than Striving Toward What Is Not Yet in Reach:

The instruction to take hold of the eternal life to which you were called is the most encouraging possible framing of the fight of faith: you are not striving toward something that you do not yet have, something that must be earned or achieved before it becomes real. You are grasping something that was given at the good confession — the life that has already been entered, the calling that has already been extended, the reality that is already more real than the world's alternatives. The fight is the fight to hold what is already yours, to pursue it more deeply, to refuse the drift that the love of money and the love of comfort and the love of theological controversy are always generating. Take hold. It is already there.

3. Let the Doxology Function as the Theological Ground of Every Practical Instruction — the Fight Is Worth Fighting Because of Who Witnesses It and Who Governs Its Outcome:

The eruption of doxology in the middle of the practical charge is not an interruption of the argument. It is the argument's foundation made visible. The charge to keep the command without spot or blame until the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ is only genuinely sustainable if the God before whom the command is to be kept is the God described in verses 15-16: the only Ruler, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the immortal, the One who lives in unapproachable light. If the fight were merely a fight before human authorities or for human approval, its cost might exceed its value. It is a fight before this God, toward this God's appearing, witnessed by the one who alone is immortal — and to that God, honor and might forever.

HOW THIS RELATES TO TODAY

The charge of verses 11-16 is the letter's most complete portrait of what the faithful minister — and, through the minister, the faithful believer — looks like in practice. Flee, pursue, fight, take hold: the four movements together describe a person who is actively oriented away from the things the false teacher is running toward and actively oriented toward the things that correspond to their identity as the man or woman of God. The contemporary temptation is to collapse this active orientation into a passive one — to define faithfulness primarily in terms of what is avoided rather than what is pursued, or

to treat the fight of faith as a metaphor for maintaining theological positions rather than the actual, sustained, costly pursuit of righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness in the ordinary texture of daily life.

The parallel between Timothy's good confession and Christ's good confession before Pontius Pilate is also one of the most pastorally sustaining observations in the passage for the believer who has made, or is being called to make, a public confession of faith in circumstances that will not guarantee a favorable outcome. The confession that Christ made before Pilate was the right confession, made at the right moment, before the right witness — and it was followed by crucifixion. The God who witnessed it did not consider the crucifixion evidence that the confession had been wrong. He raised Jesus from the dead. The good confession is always worth making, before whatever witnesses are present, regardless of the world's response — because the God who witnesses it is the King of kings and Lord of lords, and the response that ultimately matters is His.

Key Lesson: *But you, man of God — flee, pursue, fight, take hold: the four movements of the charge to Timothy are the letter's most complete portrait of the active faithfulness that the gospel calls for, waged in the sight of God who gives life to everything and of Christ Jesus who made the good confession before Pontius Pilate, and before the King of kings and Lord of lords who alone is immortal — to whom honor and might forever.*

1 Timothy 6:17–21

Command the Rich, Guard the Deposit: The Letter's Final Instructions and Farewell

(17) Command those who are rich in this present age 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.

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

(19) 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.

(20) Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge,

(21) which some have professed and in doing so have departed from the faith. Grace be with you all.

THE CONTEXT

The letter's final section divides into two carefully calibrated parts. First, the instruction to those who are rich in this present age — a qualification that distinguishes the wealth being addressed from the eschatological riches of the age to come, and that is itself a

subtle theological comment: the wealth of this present age is present-age wealth, bounded by the present age's own boundaries. The instruction for the wealthy is not the instruction of verses 9-10 — that passage addressed those who want to get rich, the desire for wealth as an organizing ambition. This passage addresses those who are already wealthy — people who may be sitting in the Ephesian assembly as its most significant financial patrons, whose wealth is real and whose temptations are specific to that reality.

The two temptations Paul identifies for the wealthy are precisely the two that wealth most naturally produces: arrogance, and the misplacement of hope. Arrogance — the sense that wealth confers a status that goes beyond its actual social significance, that the wealthy person is in some meaningful sense more than other people. And the misplacement of hope — treating the uncertain security of wealth as though it were the certain security that belongs only to God. The instruction is positive as well as corrective: put hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. The enjoyment of what God provides is affirmed — this is not the false asceticism of chapter 4, which rejected the good gifts of creation. The wealth that is received as God's provision, held with the open hand of someone who knows it is uncertain, and channeled toward good deeds and generous sharing, is the wealth that is being used in accordance with its actual nature.

Verse 19's closing description of what the wealthy gain through generous giving is one of the most remarkable statements in the passage: 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. This is the mirror image of verses 7-8's counsel of contentment — where the person with nothing recognizes that nothing material is portable, here the person with much is shown how to make it portable: by converting it, through generous giving, into the only currency that transfers across the boundary of death. The life that is truly life — the same eternal life that verse 12 charged Timothy to take hold of — is equally available to the wealthy, but only through the same taking hold that the generous use of what they have been given provides.

The letter's final verses are brief and pointed: guard what has been entrusted to your care. The deposit — the body of sound teaching, the faith once for all delivered, the mystery of godliness that the letter has been protecting throughout — is in Timothy's keeping, and the final word before the closing grace is the charge to keep it. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge — the same false teaching that has been the letter's concern since chapter 1 — because some who have professed it have departed from the faith. And then the grace: grace be with you all. The singular you of the preceding charges to Timothy expands in the final grace to the plural — with you all — encompassing the whole community the letter has been trying to form, the whole household of God that it has been trying to order, the whole Ephesian community that Timothy has been called to stay and serve and protect.

PLAIN AMERICAN ENGLISH

Tell those who are rich right now not to be arrogant, and not to put their confidence in wealth, which is so unreliable. Instead, tell them to put their hope in God, who generously provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Tell

them to do good things, to be rich in good works, and to be generous and open-handed with what they have. In doing this, they'll be storing up real treasure for themselves as a solid foundation for what is coming — so they can take hold of the life that is genuinely life. Timothy, protect what has been placed in your care. Stay away from worthless, godless talk, and the contradictions of what people falsely call knowledge. Some have followed that path and wandered away from the faith entirely. Grace be with all of you.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

"Command those who are rich in this present age not to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God": This signifies **The Instruction for the Already-Wealthy Addresses the Two Specific Temptations That Wealth Most Naturally Produces — Arrogance and Misplaced Hope — with Both a Corrective and a Positive Alternative.**

The description of wealth as uncertain is one of the most practically accurate assessments in the passage — and one of the most countercultural. The subjective experience of being wealthy is the experience of security: the resources to address problems, the buffer against the contingencies that make the poor vulnerable, the sense that most difficulties can, in principle, be managed with sufficient financial application. But the objective reality of wealth — as any comprehensive history of fortunes lost, markets crashed, empires fallen, and dynasties ended will demonstrate — is that it is unreliable in precisely the situations where the security it promises is most urgently needed. The instruction not to put hope in wealth is not merely a spiritual counsel. It is a realist assessment of what wealth can and cannot actually provide.

"Command them to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share": This signifies **The Positive Use of Material Wealth Is the Conversion of Present-Age Resources into the Currency That Transfers Across the Boundary of Death.**

The instruction to be rich in good deeds and generous in sharing is the wealthy person's version of the contentment counsel — not the abandonment of the resources they have but the proper orientation of those resources. The person who is rich in material wealth and rich in good deeds simultaneously has understood something that mere wealth management cannot teach: that the resources passing through their hands are not primarily theirs to accumulate but a provisioning of the work they have been entrusted to do. The generosity that verse 18 commends is not the grudging giving of someone who has been convinced that they should give. It is the willing sharing of someone who has genuinely taken hold of the life that is truly life — and who, having taken hold of it, has loosened their grip on the things whose value does not extend beyond this present age.

"So that they may take hold of the life that is truly life": This signifies **The Closing Description of the Wealthy Person's Goal Mirrors the Charge to Timothy in Verse 12 — Both Are Called to Take Hold of the Same Eternal Life, Through Different Instruments.**

The echo of verse 12's take hold of the eternal life in verse 19's take hold of the life that is truly life is deliberate and important. The minister and the wealthy member of the

community are given the same ultimate goal — the same eternal life, the same life that is truly life — through different immediate paths. Timothy takes hold by pursuing righteousness and fighting the good fight. The wealthy person takes hold by laying up treasure through generous giving, by converting present-age resources into the firm foundation for the coming age. Both paths lead to the same destination. Both require the active grasping that the verb take hold implies. And both are available because the God who gives life to everything — whose life-giving character was invoked before the charge to Timothy in verse 13 — is the same God who provides richly for the wealthy person's enjoyment in verse 17.

"Grace be with you all": This signifies *The Letter That Began with Grace Ends with Grace — and the Singular Charge to Timothy Opens at the Last Moment into the Plural Embrace of the Whole Community*.

The movement from the singular you of the preceding charges — guard what has been entrusted to your care, grace be with you — to the plural all of the closing grace is one of the most beautiful moments in the letter. Timothy has been the letter's primary addressee throughout: the young minister charged to stay, to command, to fight, to guard. But the grace that closes the letter is not only for him. It is for the community he was sent to serve — the community of people whose prayer life Paul ordered in chapter 2, whose worship he addressed in chapters 2 and 3, whose leaders he described in chapter 3, whose care for the vulnerable he organized in chapter 5, and whose wealthy members he has just addressed in verses 17-19. Grace be with all of them. The letter about ordering the household of God ends by extending to the whole household the gift that makes the ordering possible, the sustaining, the enabling grace that is the first and the final word of everything.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR US TODAY

1. Receive the Instruction About Hope as the Most Practically Consequential Investment Decision Available to the Wealthy — Where Hope Is Placed Determines How Everything Else Is Held: The instruction not to put hope in wealth but in God is, for the wealthy person, the decision that reorganizes every other financial decision. The person whose hope is in wealth will hold it tightly, defend it anxiously, and use it primarily to build the security that wealth is supposed to provide. The person whose hope is in God who richly provides for our enjoyment will hold wealth loosely — as the provision of a generous God rather than the security of a self-sufficient person — and will find in that looseness the freedom to be generous in exactly the ways verse 18 describes. Hope-placement is not a minor spiritual preference. It is the organizing decision that determines the entire shape of the relationship between the wealthy person and their wealth.

2. Understand Generous Giving as the Mechanism by Which Present-Age Wealth Is Converted Into the Only Currency That Transfers Across Death: Verse 19's description of generous giving as laying up treasure as a firm foundation for the coming age is the most economically precise description of the theology of giving in the letter. The person who converts their present-age wealth into good deeds and generous sharing has made, in the most literal possible sense, the only investment that survives the boundary of death. Every other financial investment is denominated in the

currency of this present age — and this present age, as the letter has been reminding from the start, is bounded. The wise wealthy person is not the one with the most sophisticated financial portfolio. It is the one who has figured out how to make present-age resources into coming-age foundations.

3. Receive the Closing Grace as Addressed to You and to Your Whole Community — the Grace of the God Who Is the Source of All the Letter Has Called For: Grace be with you all is not a conventional email sign-off. It is the final theological word of a letter that has asked enormous things of the community it addresses — charging a young minister to stay in a difficult place, ordering a community's worship and leadership, protecting the vulnerable, holding the powerful accountable, and fighting the good fight against false teaching and the love of money. The grace that closes is not merely the warm regard of an apostle for a friend. It is the divine resource that makes everything the letter has asked possible — the same grace that was poured out abundantly on the worst of sinners in chapter 1, the same grace that is the first and last word of the Thessalonian correspondence, the same grace by which everything in the household of God is sustained from beginning to end. Receive it. It is sufficient.

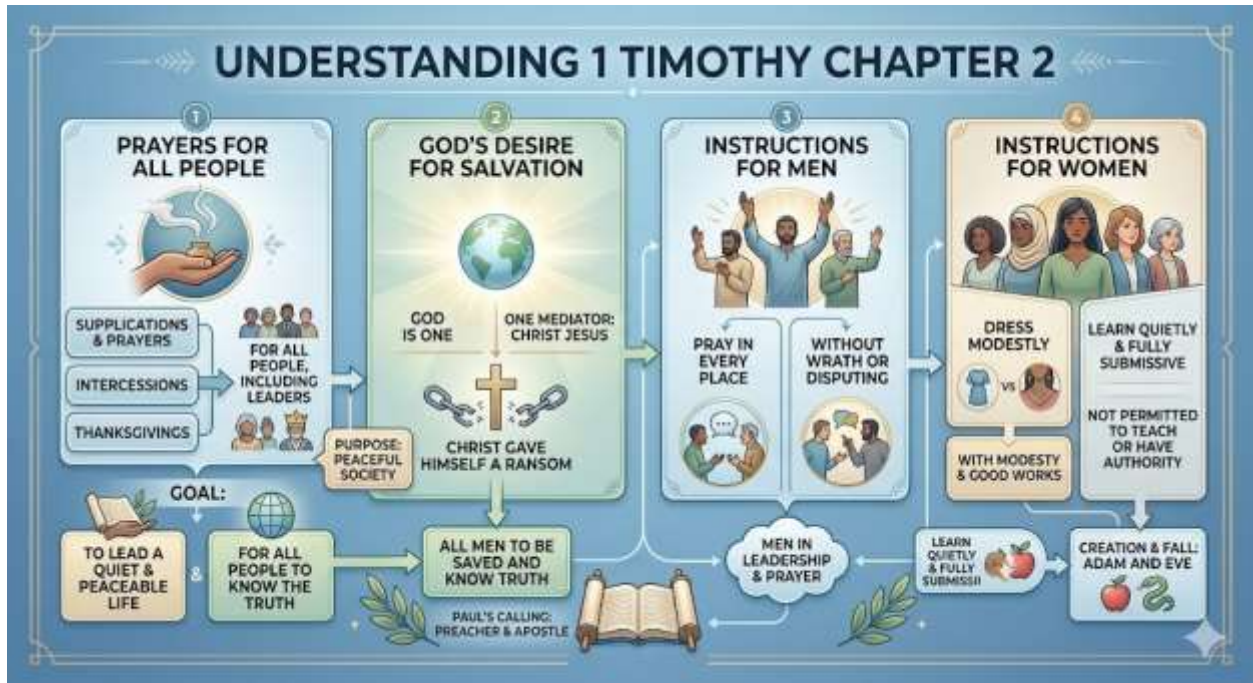
HOW THIS RELATES TO TODAY

The instruction to the wealthy — not to be arrogant, not to hope in uncertain wealth, but to be rich in good deeds and generous and willing to share — is one of the most directly applicable passages in the letter to the contemporary church in a wealthy society. The contemporary evangelical church in the developed world is, by any historical measure, extraordinarily wealthy — and the specific temptations Paul identifies for the wealthy (arrogance and the misplacement of hope in uncertain wealth) are the specific temptations that an extraordinarily wealthy church faces at an institutional level, not merely at the level of individual members. The church that has placed its institutional hope in its financial resources, its endowments, its real estate, its market position, its cultural influence — that church has placed its hope in the uncertain wealth that Paul warns against. The instruction applies.

The closing charge to guard what has been entrusted to your care — the deposit, the sound teaching, the mystery of godliness that the letter has been protecting — is also the final and most urgent word for every generation of the church that has received the apostolic teaching. The deposit does not guard itself. It requires the deliberate, sustained, costly attentiveness of people who understand what they have been given and who take seriously the responsibility of keeping it intact for the generation that will receive it from them. Guard what has been entrusted to your care — not because the God who wrote the Book of Truth cannot preserve His own deposit, but because He has chosen to do so through the faithful keeping of people whose name is written in the book and who will, at the end of the days, rise to receive their allotted inheritance.

Key Lesson: *The letter that began with grace ends with grace — and the final instructions it delivers before that closing grace are the two that gather up its whole concern: command the wealthy to convert their uncertain present-age resources into the only currency that transfers across death, by being rich in good deeds and generous in sharing; and guard what has been entrusted to*

your care, turning away from what falsely calls itself knowledge, because the deposit is worth protecting and grace is sufficient for the protecting of it.



Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We close 1 Timothy having received six chapters of the most practical and the most theologically grounded pastoral instruction in the New Testament. We close it here, at the grace that is both its first and its final word — the grace that was poured out abundantly on the worst of sinners in chapter 1, that has sustained the fight of faith through every chapter between, and that is now extended, in the letter's last breath, to all of us who have received it.

Lord, make us people of godliness with contentment — people who know that we brought nothing into the world and can take nothing out of it, and who have found in that knowledge not diminishment but liberation. Let the love of money have no grip on us — not because we have disciplined ourselves into financial austerity, but because we have taken hold of the life that is truly life, and in taking hold of it, have found that the things the love of money promises are pale substitutes for what we already have in the God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

Make us people of the good fight — who flee what is incompatible with whose people we are, and who pursue righteousness and godliness and faith and love and endurance and gentleness with the energy and the deliberateness that the fight requires. Let the confession we make be a good confession — made in the sight of God who gives life to everything and of Christ Jesus who made the good confession before Pontius Pilate, with no guarantee of a favorable outcome in this world's terms, and no need of one, because the God before whom the confession is made is the King of kings and Lord of lords.

And help us guard what has been entrusted to our care. The deposit is not ours — it was entrusted to us, as it was entrusted to Timothy, for the sake of the community it is meant to form and the generation it is meant to reach. Let us be faithful keepers of it — turning away from the godless chatter and the false knowledge that has already led some away from the faith, and holding fast to the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that leads to godliness.

Grace be with us all. It is the first word and the last word, and it is sufficient for everything in between. To the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light — to him be honor and might forever. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria
Glory to God Alone