



1 Timothy 6:3-21
 House Rules: 1 Timothy
 “Money Rules”

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Perhaps you’ve noticed, like I have, that a lot of the non-Jesus followers around us can tell when we Christians aren’t living like Jesus. And they’ll call us out for it. Now, sometimes it’s non-Christians who are mixed up. For instance, every now and then I’ll read some article from a non-Christian who blames Christians for claiming that Jesus is the way to salvation, and then will blame this supposedly concocted and misguided emphasis on Jesus for all kinds of problems in the world from Covid to natural disasters and global warming.

So, the critique is leveled against Christians, when it is Jesus who said, “I am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the father except through me” (John 3:16). **Jesus is the one who said, “Whoever hears my words and puts them in to practice is wise, and whoever does not is foolish” (Matthew 7:24-27).** And Jesus is the one who claimed equality with God and was raised from the dead. No other religious leader makes those claims. Well, some have made these kinds of claims, but they aren’t able to back it up and they get labeled as lunatics and they fade away, rather being called “Lord” and having a following in the billions. So, Jesus puts this emphasis on himself.

But sometimes, the non-believing world sees us Jesus-followers more clearly than we see ourselves. One of the places where that happens sometimes is in our relationship to money. Unfortunately, the Church has a reputation that it’s all about money; that faith is a means to financial gain. And it is true, sometimes the Church and individual Christians let money have too much power and the faith is used for financial gain. So, we all need some money rules – especially in a place like where we live. According to a Seattle Times article last week, the median cost of a house or condo in Bellevue just eclipsed Manhattan; Amazon just announced the maximum base pay for corporate and tech employees is increasing to \$350,000 because the previous max of \$160,000 wasn’t competitive enough to keep top employees; and a Seattle Times article two years ago said that the median household income in Seattle for married couples with at least one child in the

house 18 and under had reached \$202,000.¹ Money and wealth is seemingly everywhere.

And money is seductive. We are susceptible to its powers. **Scripture tells us that we are to possess our money, but often it possesses us.** This is a problem that any one of us – Christian or not – wrestles with. Now, there is good news and bad news about this. The bad news is that this problem is nothing new. It has really deep roots. The good news is that there’s a remedy for it. Paul addresses both in today’s passage. We’re going to start with the bad news, because God’s story always ends well. Let’s turn to **1 Timothy 6:3-11.**

As I said, that bad news about this theology is that it has deep roots. It goes all the way back to the first century church as Paul addresses it here: people were using their faith, and using God, for financial gain. Even prior to the birth of the church, in the early 30’s A.D., Jesus talked about money a lot, and keeping it in its place. He knew how seductive it is. And the roots go deeper than that, as well. For instance, in 539 B.C., the Persian King Cyrus allowed some of the exiled Israelites to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. And about 20 years after those people returned to rebuild the temple, the temple still laid in ruins. Why?

Here’s what the prophet Haggai said in 520 B.C., about 20 years after they’d returned for the purpose of rebuilding the temple. **“This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘These people say, ‘The time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord’s house.’” Then the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai: ‘Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?’” (Haggai 1:2-4).** So, they had fixed up all their own houses – which is fine, they needed habitable places to live – but after nearly 20 years you’d think they would have started the work that they actually got sent there to do. Clearly, they got comfortable in their own financial and material wealth. They have nice homes, even with “paneling” while the temple (God’s “house”) is sitting there – literally – as a pile of rubble. They’ve forgotten the mission, and instead profited from the mission, that they were sent to do.

Now, even *that* is not the first time Israel wrestles with this problem...but you get the point: **The temptation by God's people to use God as a means to greater financial prosperity isn't just a contemporary issue.** And Paul is saying here that when we use the faith for financial wealth, it leads to all kinds of problems in the church that then leak out into the world, or sometimes explode out into the world, for all to see. It causes "envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction" as he writes in verse 4.

Does a church marked by those characteristics that sound like a healthy church that you'd like to be a part of – let alone someone might come to who wants to find out just who this Jesus guy is? Even people who *don't* follow Jesus can sniff *that* out because it stinks. When we see God and his church as a means to financial gain, which is the theology some were espousing in the first century Church...when that becomes the reason why we engage in a relationship with God, then we are really just trying to use God for our own benefit. In essence: **We've created an idol of money, and we're making God a means to an end.** But God is not interested in being a pawn so we can glory in the idol of our money. Our money is to be used to glorify God. And this is a problem we all wrestle with in the church at some level. And even for those who aren't believers, money can become a goal, the thing for which you live, and you can end up becoming a slave to it and that brings all sorts of problem, because as Paul writes in verse 10: the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. It's not *the* root, it's not the only one, but it is a significant one when we make money our goal, and that's true regardless of what you believe about God.

So that's the bad news: sometimes, our money owns us, and there is a myriad of problems that come with that. But there's another side of the...coin. Sorry, bad pun considering the topic, but it fits. There is good news that you can bank on 😊...and is an answer to this problem. Let's continue reading, starting at verse 12 and going to the end of the chapter.

Let me just pull out some of the highlight verses...the things that give shape to this passage: Verses 11 and 12: **"...pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. 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” (1 Timothy 6:11-12). Look, when you made your confession of Jesus as Lord and Savior – whether that was for the first time or reaffirming your faith some time later like last week when our new elders and deacons affirmed their faith – did money have anything to do with it? Like, “I believe in Jesus...and his financial rewards”? No. It’s about putting our faith in Jesus and seeking to be more like him – who, clearly never made money or possession a priority. So, we confess Jesus alone. Period. End of story.

Then Paul writes, **“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” (1 Timothy 5:16).** Has there ever been a better word about finances written for our world today? “Don’t put your hope in wealth.” We need to hear that. And yet, God also gives us what we have for our enjoyment. The keys are to keep God first, thank him for what you’ve got (keeps us humble), don’t come anywhere near putting your faith in wealth because it’s uncertain, be generous with what you’ve got, and enjoy what you’ve got. That’s true about finances, material goods, relationships, the short amount of time we have on this earth, and so forth. This relationship with God is the key to taking “hold of the life that is truly life” as he writes in verse 19. **In other words, if you want to *really* live, then follow Jesus, make him lord of your life, live a Christ-like life, and be generous and open-handed with all that God gives you.**

Let me give you a couple examples of people from this church who have lived this out. We have a special restricted fund that can be used for special projects for children’s ministries here at the church. It’s called, “The Wing Memorial Fund.” It was set up by Doug and Connie Wing, who were members here for a number of years. They owned some land – a few acres, I believe – on the edge of Woodinville long before it became a wine-tasting mecca. Doug died in the 1980’s. After Connie passed away in the mid or late 90’s, the land they owned was sold per their directives, and some of the proceeds from that sale – again, according to their directives – were given to this church to establish a fund. And every year up to \$1,000 may be used for children’s ministries projects, capital improvements, and so forth. That fund

has been a huge blessing to our children's ministries for a couple decades or so now, and it continues...and it's all because of their generosity and intentionality. If you want to plan to be generous in some way like that, and if you don't have someone to work with to help ensure it happens, let me know and I can get you in touch with someone who can help.

Now, that kind of giving doesn't have to happen after we've passed away. Nine years ago, a couple in the church sold a home and gave 10% of the profits from the sale to the church to help us start our modern worship service – that gift paid for audio equipment we needed, and helped pay for this new position we created to lead the music in worship, which helped us to ease that new position into our budget. It was a huge blessing. These are but two examples of many, from our own church family, of people who have been generous and willing to share as Paul writes.

If you're *not* a Jesus follower, I realize this generosity to the church might sound strange or unexpected to you. **But that's the way things work in the church, because the Christian's foundation and example is the strange and unexpected love of God.** You see, even though we've all done plenty for God to simply say, "Enough with all of you, I'm moving on," he has instead loved us and made a way for us to be in his presence. In fact, he chooses to dwell in us even now, by his Holy Spirit. And he's done all of this through his son, Jesus Christ, who died for us on the cross. **So, this strange, unexpected, undeserved love and grace of God is our own foundation and example for how we live.** Do we do so perfectly? No. We are susceptible to temptations – not the least of which are financial ones. But God keeps reaching out and drawing us back to him. And ultimately, He is the answer to our sinful tendencies to make money our god. Let's stay centered on Him, and the mission he's calling us to, so we don't get distracted like in Haggai's day or like the church Timothy was leading.

So, Paul's admonitions here and throughout this letter are for Timothy the church leader, but he is to teach them to the church. Paul tells him that several times. So ultimately: this letter is a message for the church. With that in mind, I want to close out this sermon series with a story that ties in well with Paul's words here to fight the good fight of the faith, but also

summarizes the role of the church in our lives and draws this series to a close. This story comes from this guy: **Sylvester Stallone**. Now, when you think of him, you probably think of either Rambo or Rocky, and you figure the tie-in to fighting the good fight comes from one of those movies, because let's be honest: there's a lot of fighting in them.



But here's the thing²: Sylvester Stallone was raised in a Christian home, attended Catholic schools and was "taught the faith." In a 2006 interview he shared that as he went out into the "real world," temptation came and he lost his way, making a lot of bad choices, including putting his career ahead of his faith and family. **In other words, money (and other things) became lord of his life.** (Fame and fortune often go hand-in-hand, right?)

There was a point when he went back to his Christian heritage and roots. Stallone shares: "The more I go to church and the more I turn myself over to the process of believing in Jesus and listening to his Word and having him guide my hand, I feel as though the pressure is off me now." Then he adds: **"You cannot train yourself. I feel the same way about Christianity and about what the church is: The church is the gym of the soul"** (Sylvester Stallone).

Didn't see that coming, did you? But it's spot-on. "The church is the gym of the soul." Are you in the "gym of the soul" much? How's your spiritual fitness level? How's the marathon of life with Jesus going? **The only place where we get equipped and trained to fight the good fight of faith in Jesus, is in the church.** It's the only place you'll get a consistent message pointing you to the God who made you and saves you and longs to be with you here and for eternity. It's the only place where symbols of death – the cross and the tomb – are heralded as symbols of God's forgiveness, and eternal life. It's the only place where you'll get spiritually fit, and encouraged to then go out in the world where your training gets put into practice. 1 Timothy helps us understand how a church can operate in a healthy way and shine the light of Christ in a dark world, so that an unbelieving world would be drawn to Jesus because of how we live, rather than repelled.

And so, I hope you walk closely with Jesus because he is the key to abundant and eternal life...and I hope that your walk with him includes some exercise at the gym of your soul...the church. It's through faith in Jesus and participating in his church that makes us ready to "fight the good fight of the faith" and to "live the life that is truly life." Or, to quote Jesus himself, to live an "abundant life" through faith in him. And that's what God wants for you and me, because that is what we're made for. Let's pray...Amen.

¹ <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/data/seattles-median-income-soars-past-100000-but-wealth-doesnt-reach-all/>
"Seattle affluence hit another milestone in 2019. For the city's roughly 50,000 married couples with kids younger than 18, the median household income passed the \$200,000 mark for the first time, hitting \$202,000."

² From the newsletter of Hyde Park United Methodist Church: <http://hydeparkchurch.org/stallone-the-church-is-the-gym-of-the-soul/>

I did other research to verify the story, as well.