

Dr. Robert Yarbrough, Pastoral Epistles, Session 7, 1 Timothy 6 - The Pastoral Epistles: Apostolic Instruction for Pastoral Leaders and Their Followers, 6-min. Video Overview

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So, today we're going to dive into a letter that's almost 2,000 years old. It's basically a message from a mentor to his protege who's been tasked with leading a community in this really bustling, complex city. And believe it or not, the advice it gives on wealth, power, and inequality is, well, it's surprisingly, and sometimes pretty uncomfortably, modern.

Let's see what it has to teach us. So, this is really the big question we're tackling. We're looking at the final chapter of a letter from the New Testament, 1 Timothy.

And we're asking, in a world that is just obsessed with success and making money, what can this ancient piece of advice possibly offer us today? You know, the answers might actually surprise you. Okay, first things first, let's set the stage a bit. The letter is from the Apostle Paul to Timothy.

Timothy's a young leader in the super prosperous Roman city of Ephesus. And this isn't some abstract philosophy he's writing. It's a practical, hands-on leadership manual for dealing with some very, very tricky social issues.

Now, what's really interesting here is that these instructions in Chapter 6, they don't just pop out of nowhere. As our source for this explainer, a lecture by Dr. Robert Yarbrough, points out, they're actually part of this bigger, ongoing conversation about how this new Christian message was supposed to totally revolutionize real-world relationships, you know, between men and women, old and young, and, as we're about to see, masters and slaves. And yeah, that brings us to the first major hurdle the text throws at us.

It's a topic that, let's be honest, is deeply uncomfortable and pretty controversial for any of us to read today: the institution of slavery. The chapter kicks off with this incredibly challenging instruction. And when you read that in isolation, it's jarring, right? It seems to be endorsing a system that we all rightly find completely abhorrent.

But to get what's going on, we have to understand the crucial point our source makes. And here it is. This was not a condoning of slavery.

It was practical guidance for navigating what was called a ubiquitous social reality. In other words, the text is talking to people who are already inside this existing system. It is not creating a theological rubber stamp for the system itself.

That's a huge distinction. And that historical context is just, it's everything here. As the source highlights, the slavery happening in the first-century Roman world was vastly different from the 19th-century American slavery we usually picture.

It wasn't primarily race-based, and getting freed was actually pretty common. Now, let's be clear, that does not make it right, but it's absolutely crucial for understanding the world this letter was written into. So the ultimate argument from respected scholars like F.F. Bruce is that the core ethics of the text, ideas about human dignity and equality for all, created an atmosphere where, over time, slavery could only wither and die.

The long-term goal was to dismantle the whole institution from the inside out. So, after tackling that huge social structure, the letter then kind of pivots and turns inward. It starts dealing with a problem of motivation.

See, Timothy was up against a group of false teachers who weren't driven by faith but by a desire for good old-fashioned financial profit. The real problem was this twisted idea that sounds, well, it sounds eerily familiar, doesn't it? The idea that faith is basically a get-rich-quick scheme. You can think of it like an ancient prosperity gospel.

These teachers were spinning the message, claiming that being godly was a surefire path to getting wealthy. A pretty powerful temptation, then and now. To make this feel real, our source tells this powerful story about a young seminary student.

He was completely torn. He could either keep studying the Bible, or he could accept this huge financial portfolio from his dad. And he confessed.

He said, I see these houses, and I see these cars. That's what I want. That right there is the exact unscrupulous motive this ancient letter was warning about.

But then the text hits us with this absolutely brilliant reversal. It takes their whole concept of gain and just completely redefines it. The real profit, it says, isn't wealth.

It's a mix of godliness and contentment. This just flips the entire value system of those false teachers right on its head. And what's the logic behind such a radical idea? Well, it's a dose of simple, stark reality.

It reminds everyone of a truth we all know deep down. You arrive in this world with nothing, and you're going to leave with nothing. That eternal perspective suddenly makes the frantic rush to pile up temporary wealth seem kind of pointless, doesn't it? And all this builds up to one of the most famous warnings ever written.

Notice it's not money itself, but the love of it. That insatiable desire that drives so much of our modern hustle culture. That's what becomes a root that nourishes all kinds of evil and destructive behavior.

It's the ultimate dead end on the path those false teachers were walking. Okay. So if the love of money is so dangerous, what about the people who already have it? Well, the letter doesn't condemn them.

Instead, it gives very specific instructions to the wealthy folks in the community. And it outlines both the dangers and the unique potential that comes with their position. The message wasn't, "Hey, get rid of all your money."

It was a call for a complete reorientation, a total shift from just piling it up to finding what we might call an ethical purpose for it. The goal was to transform their mindset from just building personal security to building a legacy of generosity. Their wealth wasn't a problem to be solved.

It was a tool to be repurposed. And the letter lays it out in five super clear, actionable commands. It starts with your attitude.

Knock off the arrogance that can come with wealth and stop putting your hope in money because it's fundamentally uncertain. Instead, put your hope in God. Then from that new foundation, the commands turn to action.

Use what you have to become rich in good deeds, be generous, and be willing to share. It's a really powerful framework for ethical wealth. So why do all this? I mean, what's the payoff? Well, the letter promises something way bigger than just financial security.

It promises the ability to take hold of the life that is truly life, a deeper, more meaningful existence that, frankly, money just can't buy. The letter then builds to this incredible climax. It shifts from general advice to this direct, personal, and urgent charge to the leader, to Timothy himself.

These are his marching orders. First, the negative command. Flee.

And this isn't just a gentle suggestion to resist temptation. It's a command to turn and literally run from it all. The love of money, the pointless arguments, all the corrupting stuff that leads you away from a life of purpose.

It's an urgent call to escape. But you can't just run from something, right? You have to run towards something better. So the second command is to pursue.

It sets a new direction, a whole new set of goals to chase after with everything you've got. Righteousness, godliness, faith, love, and endurance. Third, this chase isn't meant to be easy or passive.

The command is to fight. Leadership, according to this text, is an active, strenuous struggle. It's a fight against both the pressures from the outside and the temptations on the inside.

It's about engaging in the good fight. And finally, the fourth command is a defensive one. It's the core responsibility that holds it all together.

Guard. It's a call to protect what's been entrusted to you, to guard the integrity of the message and the well-being of the community you're leading. Flee, pursue, fight, guard.

A four-part mandate for any leader. Which brings us right back to where we started. This ancient letter, written for a young leader in a Roman port city, forces us to ask a deeply modern question.

In a culture that so often measures a person's value by their net worth, what does it actually mean to pursue a life of contentment, of purpose, of real meaning? A life that is, in its own words, truly life? Now that is a question worth fighting for.