

Coach House Church BEACONS

BEING CONTENT

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In this time when communities take a special interest in creating conflict around the world and when companies are resorting to redundancies and pay cuts, I thought it would be useful to talk about a passage in 1 Timothy. 1 Timothy is written by Paul to Timothy as a form of mentorship during a time when the Ephesian church was being affected by false doctrines and strange lifestyles. 1 Timothy Chapter 6 is the concluding remarks from Paul that specifically speak against ideas on creating intentional conflict and profiteering off of the Gospel.

Let us then take a look at the passage of 1 Timothy Chapter 6, verses 3 to 21:

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, who have been robbed of the truth and 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.

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.

17 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. 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 so doing have departed from the faith.

Grace be with you all.

In this epistle's conclusion to Timothy, Paul writes up what he thinks of wealth, godliness, and responsible Christian teaching.

Paul begins his conclusion with a call to be responsible and protect the faith. He calls us to not just passively defend what we believe is true but to actively understand and recognise false teachings and false teachers. We are given a list of characteristics to watch out for in a person who claims to teach about Christianity. Should a person ever display an unhealthy interest in stirring up the pot for the sake of argument, we, as Christians cannot casually accept their teachings.

We need to admit to the fact that they are teaching falsely. False doctrine is not a small thing to laugh off as a joke. As Christians, any kind of teaching about Jesus should be something that is beneficial to our spiritual health. Good teaching is

something that comes from God, and it naturally transforms our lives. False doctrine posing as good teaching is dangerous, malicious, and a threat that has no place in our lives.

Of course, we're not saying that it's wrong to hear out other people's points of view. It is a fact of life that different people believe in different things. This may mean lifestyle, philosophies, or religion. However, it is absolutely wrong for someone to disguise themselves as teachers of the faith we believe in and teach a set of beliefs contrary to what we know is essentially true. How can you say that you follow Christ if you do not follow what Christ has taught? How much more terrible is it if you claim to teach others about Christ when you do not know Christ at all!

What kind of people are those who teach falsely? Paul characterizes a specific type in his letter to Timothy. There are people who falsely teach Christianity, conceited, and disagreeing with what has been taught by Christ. These types of people think they know better when they do not. They also have an interest in stirring up the hornet's nest, facilitating unhealthy disputes among others. They bring disunity, suspicions, and rumors.

We all understand idioms such as "creating an atmosphere of healthy debate" or "playing the devil's advocate." To think is good. But there is a point where we can absolutely say that an argument has been meaninglessly created or that a certain conflict is unhealthy.

And, more commonly, there are people who, as we say, like to debate. Perhaps this description is for a friend or family member. Perhaps it reflects us, as individuals. And, perhaps, if we are being really honest with ourselves, there is a small part of us, in the deepest, darkest corners of our minds, that find it really fun when we see people disagreeing with each other. Again, it's good to learn from other points of view. But it might be a problem when our interest in debates and arguments does not come from a healthy desire to learn

Maybe we like it when we see red faces swell up in anger. Maybe we like it when people keep spouting out words, shouting over each other. Maybe we like it when we ourselves watch the person sitting across from us splutter out phrases, desperately trying to string together an argument against our own.

And maybe we have not had anyone tell us that this kind of behaviour isn't exactly the best. Maybe we forgot it or brushed it off as someone nagging us about a personality trait we should fix. Or, even worse, maybe we think that those who get angry are just too small-minded and that a little anger would do them good after they settle down and have a hard think about why they are wrong.

A theological discussion can very well be healthy and informative, but it becomes a terrible thing when the primary purpose is to rile up the other person and create conflict. Paul here is saying that there's something very, clearly, absolutely wrong if someone is intentionally creating a situation that can destroy relationships.

A Christian lives in Jesus Christ and walks with the Spirit. We are called to practice and bear the fruits of the Spirit, the first three being love, joy, and peace. If our actions disrupt even one of these concepts, then there is a problem. There is no compromise in what we believe in, and that will never ever change. We believe in unchanging principles and morals. We also believe in the weakness of humanity and its imperfect, continual failings. If something is wrong, then it is wrong.

We also believe in the eternal, unchanging authority, forgiveness, and grace of God. If we have done something wrong and we admit to this failing with genuine intention to change before God, then our God is willing to forgive. Of course, that is always easier said than done.

Returning to Paul, the passage says that false teachers are also teachers who sell the Gospel. The Gospel, the Good News, is not news that is the product to our financial security. Christians and our churches really need to reevaluate our priorities if we think Christianity is a materially profitable business.

Paul here is taking the time to clarify the Christian view of money. We often hear the misquoted phrase, "Money is the root of all evil." It very well is not. It is the love of money that is the issue.

Christians should respect money as a material possession like any other. Money is not evil or good. It simply is a material possession in this world that is used and processed in all sorts of ways, for good or evil.

As Christians, we believe in a God who can fulfil us entirely. This means spiritually and physically. A hard truth that comes out of this concept is that Christians have to let go of the false concept that we need an attachment to money in our lives.

As humans, we will very likely always use money for the rest of our time on earth. But as Christians, we recognise that a love for money has no place in our spiritual lives. Money will never make us complete. Pouring your love and obsession into any material object will never make us complete.

What makes us complete is God. For that reason, our material possessions are things we should be grateful for. What we have is something we should be content with. This includes food, clothing, and money.

Those who desire material possessions, and this includes money, have already fallen into a spiritual trap. The trap is a false belief they have already accepted as true, that we cannot be content without more of this or that.

Paul commands Timothy in this conclusion to recognise these pitfalls in life, avoid them, and pursue godliness. This is the Christian view that we have hope in something eternal, that we will live eternally, and that this eternal hope shapes our limited, human here-and-now lifestyle.

If Christian leaders have financial motivations when driving their message home to their audience, it should be natural that their credibility disappears. Financial profiteering during times of crisis should be a good indicator of false teachers. However, we must also remember that this also reflects upon leaders who are already in a stable position in life, be they Christian or otherwise.

If we remain faithful to God, there can be immediate relief, enduring hope, and eternal gain. Paul does not say anything negative about those who are rich. It is not wrong or un-Christian to be rich. But Paul does remind us again that their riches are a very present source of temptation and false hope.

As Christians, there is a clear and perhaps difficult call to detach ourselves from false teachings, be they sources of meaningless debates or material obsessions. This passage, 1 Timothy Chapter 6, is yet another encouragement to take hope in the eternal God, whose power to fulfil is truly complete, as immediate hope and relief for an eternal tomorrow.

Amen



Daniel Lam



Coach House Church

leadership@coachhousechurch.org // 0161 432 5604

the coach house church, 222 wellington road north, stockport sk4 2qn