

1 Timothy 6:1-10 Bible Study Commentary – Guide For Small Groups

I. Instructions for slaves (1-2)

Cross-References

Colossians 4:1 – Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

Ephesians 6:5 – Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ.

Exodus 21:16 – Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death.

Galatians 3:28 – There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Colossians 3:22-24 – Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, 24 since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Verse by Verse Commentary

1. Does the Bible condone slavery? –

Neither slavery in New Testament times nor slavery under the Mosaic covenant had anything to do with the sort of slavery where “black” people were bought and sold as property by “white” people in the well-known slave trade over the last few centuries. No “white” Christian should think that they can use any slightly positive comment about slavery in these sections to justify the historic slave trade, which is still a major stain on the histories of both the U.S. and U.K.

The extreme kindness to be shown to slaves/servants commanded in the Bible among the Israelites was often prefaced by a reminder that they too were slaves at the hand of the Egyptians. In other words, they were to treat slaves/servants in a way that they wanted to be treated.

As we already know, slavery was common in the Middle East as far back as ancient Egypt. If God had simply ignored it, then there would have been no rules for their treatment and they could have treated them harshly with no rights. But since they did have rights and rules for their protection, it showed that God cared for them as well. However, this is often misconstrued for an endorsement of slavery, which it is not. God listed slave traders among the worst of sinners in 1 Timothy 1:10:

Also Exodus 21:16 – Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death.

According to this verse those people involved in the slave trade in the 16th to 19th centuries should be executed. In light of such rules, slaves/servants in Israelite culture came about by their own actions, whether from among the Israelites or neighboring cultures. Slaves in the Roman empire may, however, have been forced into it. Slavery in Israel is a type of bankruptcy law. With this, a government doesn’t step in, but a person, who has lost themselves to debt, can sell the only thing they have left, their ability to perform labor. This is a loan. In six years the loan was paid off, and they are set free. Bond servants who did this made a wage, had their debt

covered, had a home to stay in, on-the-job training, and did it for only six years. This almost sounds better than college, which doesn't cover debt and you have to pay for it!

A few pointers to remember:

A. Slaves under Mosaic Law were different from the harshly treated slaves of other societies, more like servants or bond servants.

B. The Bible doesn't give an endorsement of slave traders but the opposite (1 Timothy 1:10). A slave/bond servant was acquired when a person voluntarily entered into it when he needed to pay off his debts.

C. The Bible recognizes that slavery is a reality in this sin-cursed world and doesn't ignore it, but instead gives regulations for good treatment by both masters and servants and reveals they are equal under Christ.

D. Israelites could sell themselves as a slave/bond servant to have their debts covered, make a wage, have housing and be set free after six years. Foreigners could sell themselves as a slave/bond servant as well. Thus it was voluntary and temporary.

E. In God's family every person is equal and valued (Galatians 3:28). For example in 1 Timothy 3 qualifications for elders and deacons were listed out. If slaves met the qualifications through their own character they could also be leaders of the church.

F. Biblical Christians led the fight to abolish slavery.

So inside the church, slaves were not to be treated any differently than anyone else and had the same rights. Outside the church the rules of the government meant that slavery was a reality which Paul taught about so that believing slaves would know how to act.

2. Regard their own masters as worth of all honor – Paul prescribes the attitude which slaves are to have toward their masters. Slaves are to treat their masters with honor. Honoring a master means respectful, polite, and obedient. A slave who honors his master would be loyal and a hard worker. On the other hand, grumbling, complaining, bitterness, or gossiping about a master are all the opposite of honoring.

3. So that God and doctrine will not be spoken against – Paul understands the consequences for Christianity if slaves began to revolt against their owners in the name of Christ. "The Way" of Jesus was new to people in the Roman Empire.

They already had many false impressions and confusions about this faith. People in the Roman Empire actually at times believed that Christians practiced cannibalism (partaking of the Lord's body for communion) and orgies (love feasts, which were in reality just fellowship meals.) Some also thought that Christians were incestuous because they called each other "brother and sister."

If slaves revolted then the government would turn against this new faith. Christianity would be viewed as anti-social and trying to topple the current society. Persecution would ramp up. Masters and their families who could be won over through the gracious attitudes of their servants would likely instead turn against this faith which cost them their prosperity. In the end, the cause of the gospel would suffer.

In 1 Corinthians 9:19 Paul said that he became "all things to all people so that I might by all means save some." For slaves to continue in obedience to their masters was an extension of this principle. Winning people to Christ and helping them win eternal freedom from sin was more important than the temporary freedom from slavery.

Generally the Bible seeks to change society from the inside out one person at a time, rather than working through revolution. Paul, for example, advised Philemon to set his slave, Onesimus, free. This was the Christian thing to do.

Application: Employees should be respectful to their bosses and seek to win them to Christ through their actions. Your attitudes and behavior at work should be a testimony for Christ and bring people to Him, not repulse them.

4. Christian slaves should be faithful to Christian masters – Some Christian slaves had Christian masters. They may have thought that since they were brothers in Christ they were not obligated to fulfill their responsibilities. Being tempted to take advantage of the good graces and forgiveness of their bosses, they might become lazy and disrespectful. Paul warns them that this is the wrong track. Instead they should work even harder to bring blessing to their believing bosses.

Note that Paul was talking to the slaves, not the masters here. It is an important distinction. If he were talking to the masters, he would have said something different as in Colossians 4:1 and to Philemon. To slaves, he would emphasize obedience. And to masters, he would emphasize justice and mercy.

If you are a parent with multiple children you know how the idea of highlighting a different principle to different children works. For example, if you leave the house in charge of your teen you may tell him, “Don’t be bossy. Serve your younger sibling.” But to the younger sibling you say, “Obey what your older sister tells you to do. Be helpful and have a good attitude.” Telling the younger sibling to obey in no way means that the older should take advantage by issuing many commands.

Application: You may have a Christian boss. If so, do not take advantage of the mercy he shows. Do not think, “I can show up late because he will forgive me.” His goodness is not something to be exploited. Instead be an even better and more diligent employee, knowing that it is a member of God’s own family who is benefiting from your hard work.

Discussion Questions

- Slaves were told to honor their masters. How would this look if it was practiced?
- Why does Paul tell them to do this?
- Is the Bible condoning slavery? Why or why not?
- How should slaves treat believing masters?
- We are not slaves, but can we make any application from this?
- How should you treat a boss who is a believer?

II. Instructions about false teachers (3-5)

Cross-References

2 Peter 2:1- But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.

2 Corinthians 11:13-15 – For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

2 Timothy 4:3-4 – For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

Verse by Verse Commentary

1. If anyone advocates with a different doctrine – The gospel Paul presented to people and its basic teachings is clear. There is one God. There is one way to God. There is one revealed word. There is one gospel. There is salvation in one alone. He has given us everything we need for life and for godliness. God is not a universalist. Neither does He accept relative truth. There is one truth, not many forms of it. While genuine believers may disagree on some more minor or obscure points the clear teaching of the gospel is agreed upon by all.

Make no mistake. Satan is a master of lies. He appears an angel of light. His purpose is to thwart and twist God's good designs. He and his minions infiltrate the church to try to spread heresies.

Application: We must be vigilant. False teachers are everywhere. Never has it been easier to propagate a false teaching. Television, radio, and the internet make it simple to get your agenda in front of many vulnerable eyes and ears. To become more discerning, we must immerse ourselves in the truth. We must study the truth and be so familiar with it, that we can instantly recognize perversions of it.

2. Verse 4 – Here Paul describes the qualities of the false teacher who is trying to lead sheep astray. Such a person is prideful. He is arrogant and unteachable. At the same time, he is ignorant. While he may like to talk a lot, his eyes haven't been enlightened by Christ and he therefore doesn't understand what he is talking about.

A false teacher claims to be very smart. He tries to appear to be very wise. He talks about stuff he doesn't know anything about. And he boasts loudly. Whatever knowledge he has or thinks he has, puffs him up.

This pride reminds me of many cult leaders. These leaders demand unquestioning obedience to themselves. If anyone asks them about their teaching or wants more biblical proof about a claim they make, they tend to get very angry. HOW DARE YOU DOUBT ME! Instead of graciously turning to the Scripture, they will boast about their credentials, "I have been to seminary" or "I have been teaching for years" or "I know more about this than you do."

Waco cult illustration – When I was eight, about an hour drive away from my house, a false teacher who renamed himself David Koresh was declared himself the leader of a sex-crazed cult. Has anyone heard of David Koresh? He said it was his duty to establish a House of David and he told the women of the cult that God had commanded him to procreate with them. They listened. Seventy six cult members listened to him all the way to their deaths in a conflict with the government. The false teacher is prideful and controlling. He cares only for himself.

We are commanded to be quick to listen and slow to speak. These false teachers are quick to speak and slow to listen. They love to hear themselves talk. They love to share their opinions. They will seldom say "I don't know" when asked a difficult question. Why? They are prideful. They think they know everything.

In addition, false teachers have many other character problems. They enjoy arguing and debating about foolish things. Generally they are divisive. If there is a quarrel in the church, they are likely in the middle of it. Instead of promoting peace and unity, they promote strife, abusive language, and evil suspicions. In other words, you can see a false teacher not only from their teachings, but also from their lifestyle. For more on this see our notes on 2 Peter 2:12-22: <https://studyandobey.com/sermons/2-peter-2-12-22/>

3. Men of depraved mind – False teachers like this are not "misled brethren." They are not brethren at all. Paul describes them as having a "depraved" mind. Still in the darkness, their minds have not been transformed by the Holy Spirit. Instead they are still slaves of sin. What they need is salvation.

4. False teachers teach wrong doctrines about money to justify their greed –

The prosperity gospel exists largely because false teachers perpetuate this doctrine in order to justify their own luxurious standard of living. They make money on the backs of everyday believers and because of their lies that God will return money to those who donate to their ministries.

1 Timothy 6:10 – 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.

A popular South African pastor who is called Shepherd Bushiri has not one, not two, but three private jets. And these are in addition to his fleet of luxury cars. When a person on Facebook called him out on his luxurious living, he said, “You are using a phone to post that. Should you give that up too?”

In a church I attended before it was discovered that the pastor embezzled money meant for the church into his own private account.

Brothers and sisters, this should not be. God does give nice things. In James 1:17 it says that “every perfect gift is from above.” Paul said that Christian workers could make their living by working for God. But that is a far different thing than becoming rich and living a life of wanton luxury, all coming from the money given by those one supposed to serve.

Paul warns us about these false teachers. They are looking to get rich from the gospel, not realizing that godliness is a gain itself. In other words, godliness is its own reward. Godliness has many other benefits for those who pursue it, but it is wrong to try to pursue God because you think it will make you rich.

What attitude should we have?

1 Timothy 6:6 – But godliness with contentment is great gain.

The gain of sharing the gospel and teaching others the Bible is NOT the money you can get, but it is the privilege and blessing of serving Jesus Christ.

Application: When you are searching for a church, do not just immediately join the first church you see. Pay attention to the lifestyle of the leaders of the church. If the leaders of the church are living a lifestyle way higher than everyone around them, beware. Go to a church where the Bible is faithfully taught. Pay careful attention to the lifestyle of the pastors.

Discussion Questions

- What kind of sound words might the false teacher disagree with?
- What is the false teachers’ attitude towards controversial questions?
- Where do these kinds of questions lead?
- What does the word “depraved” mean in verse 5?
- What does it signify about these false teachers’ spiritual condition?
- Are they simply believers who have some doctrine wrong?
- What key principle can we see they misunderstand in verse 5 and following?

III. Instructions about money (6-10)

Cross-References

Hebrews 13:5 – Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

Matthew 6:24 – No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

Ecclesiastes 5:10 – He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.

Luke 12:15 – And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

Proverbs 22:1 – A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold.

Philippians 4:19 – And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Verse by Verse Commentary

1. Godliness is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment – One time someone asked me, “If I believe in Jesus, what do I get?” He was wondering if following Jesus would help him get a better job, or make more money, or become rich. This is the same trap that the false teachers in the previous verses were falling into. Many people look at religion as a means of gaining wealth.

Paul says that in fact being godly does result in great gain, but that gain is not material.

So what does someone who is godly gain? Write down whatever you can think of:

- Good friends (Proverbs 27:17)
- Joy (John 15:11)
- Peace (John 14:27)
- Forgiveness (John 1:12)
- Eternal life (Matthew 25:46)
- Victory (Romans 8:37)
- Security (Proverbs 10:24)
- A clear conscience (Hebrews 13:18)

Money and materials do not bring contentment or happiness. These come from a proper relationship with God, nothing else. Anytime a person tries to shortcut or find their own way to happiness it won’t work.

Take for example the kid who stays up in the middle of the night trying to download and play games on a tablet. Is he really enjoying peace and happiness when he does so? He feels guilty and he misses out because the next day he is grumpy and upset. His parents find out and he is grounded so cannot enjoy the fun his siblings do.

All the money in the world cannot buy happiness.

2. For we brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out of it – You cannot take your fancy cars, electronics, golf clubs, or mansion with you when you die. You cannot even take the clothing on your back. Your soul goes and leaves everything on earth behind.

Therefore we need to have a long term perspective, asking ourselves the question, “Is what I am doing now going to make a difference one hundred years from now?” Jesus said we should not store up treasure on earth. Moth and rust destroy, stock markets go down, and thieves scam and steal. Even if you manage to keep your money safe, you cannot send it ahead of you to eternity.

Application: We can invest in God's kingdom with our time and money now. In this way we can build up treasures in heaven. Instead of using our money for ourselves, let us consider how to build God's kingdom with it. We can support missionaries, give toward church planting and discipleship, and spend more time ministering to our families and serving God in or out of church instead of wracking up hours of overtime.

3. But if we have food and clothing we will be content with that – Paul tells us clearly what are the basic needs in life. They are far less than what most people would consider a need. The world is very different now. People have more and expect more. Most people rarely even stop to consider and appreciate basic things that are available to us like running water and electricity. Instead a charged cell phone, and super fast internet are considered to be top priorities!

Application: We should be grateful for (and parents should teach their kids to be grateful for) all of the many blessings in our lives. Rather than setting our hopes on the latest and greatest thing, let us spend more time to thank God for what we already have. In your prayers spend some time to thank God for some of the many things you have that you don't need. Then also consider the many people in the world that still struggle with the basics. What can you do to help people who are truly in need?

4. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap – Note that Paul does not vilify making money. Neither does he say it is wrong to be rich. He is not advocating some kind of socialist or revolutionary attack against rich people. Rather he is talking about people's motivations and heart attitude. A person who sets his heart on worldly riches will fall into temptations. His greed will cause him to sin in many potential ways.

The lure of riches will seduce him into doing things he would not otherwise have done if he wasn't setting his heart on money. For example, a person who desires most of all to honor God would not consider telling a lie to save money whereas a person who wants to get rich would. A person who seeks after God first will not consider altering paperwork illegally in order to make more money. A greedy person will.

We live in a world that is obsessed with money. How can you avoid falling into this trap? How can you be sure that your heart is in the right place? How can you decide whether or not you should work so much overtime in pursuit of a promotion or in order to keep your job?

5. The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil – We have a choice, love God or love money. Loving money leads to many poor decisions. Spend a few minutes to write down various evil that comes as a result of loving money:

- Choosing money and work over family.
- Tax fraud or evasion.
- Dishonesty in business or negotiating.
- Selfishness.
- Envy.
- Stinginess.
- Manipulating others to "pay the bill."
- Addiction to shopping or fads.
- Gambling.
- Prioritizing profit over ethics in business.
- Competition and strife with people instead of mutual respect and encouragement.

Discussion Questions

- Can you think of any time in the Bible where a person is commended for pursuing money? What about where a person is condemned for loving money too much (young ruler, Elisha's helper?, Achan)?

- How does the Bible say we should use money? What is its purpose? (Luke 16:9)
- What should our attitude be towards money?
- Why do people want to make more money?
- Looking at verse 8, is there any situation in life where it might be OK to be discontent?
- What kind of sins spring from a love of money?
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Application: How can you use your money to serve God?