**GOSPEL CULTURE IN GOD’S HOUSEHOLD**

**THE HEALTHY WEALTHY CHRISTIAN**

**1 Timothy 6:17-21**

**INTRODUCTION**

This is our last message in our series on 1 Timothy called Gospel Culture in God’s Household. We began this series in September with the aim of learning about how the gospel transforms local churches into radical communities characterized by humility, prayer, thanksgiving, godliness, service, and contentment. God’s household is meant to be a place where its pastors lead by example, where the weakest are cared for, and where sin is taken seriously. And now, 14 sermons later, Paul concludes this divinely inspired letter with one final word to the wealthy.

The “wealthy Christian” may seem to some to be an oxymoron. How can one be wealthy and at the same time be a healthy Christian? After all, didn’t Jesus tell the rich young ruler to sell all his possessions, give to the poor, and come follow him? We just saw 6:10 that “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils”, and the pattern in the New Testament is that most of the early Christians were poor.

For example, in 1 Corinthians 1:26, Paul says that most of the believers in Corinth came from humble backgrounds. Not many were wise, or powerful, or of noble birth. In Jesus’ Parable of the Great Banquet in Luke 14 the master of the feast sent his servant to invite the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame because everyone else had rejected his invitation. The Christian faith has always welcomed the weak and the poor, because they’re often the ones who are most grateful for God’s mercy.

Having said that, the New Testament also shows us that there were wealthy Christians as well:

* In Luke 8:3, we’re told that Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s household manager travelled with Jesus and was one of the women who provided for him and the apostles.
* In Luke 27:57, we’re told that Joseph of Arimathea, who gave up his tomb for Jesus, was a rich man.
* In Acts 4:36-37 we’re told that Barnabas, one of the leading disciples in the early church, “sold *a* field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet”

And in 1 Timothy 6, we see that there were wealthy Christians in the Ephesian church as well as Paul gives specific instructions to the rich members of Timothy’s church.

There is such a thing as wealthy Christians. And as we’ll see today, wealthy Christians can also be healthy Christians, not in the sense that the “health and wealth” teachers mean when they talk about living your best life now or completely avoiding all suffering if you just have enough faith, but in the biblical sense of the healthy Christian: one who is humbly devoted to serving others, growing in godliness, and walking in the fear of the Lord. But in order to be a wealthy and healthy Christian, one must avoid the dangers of wealth and learn how to use that wealth for God’s glory.

You may be thinking, “This doesn’t apply to me, because I’m not wealthy. There are so many people who are wealthier than me!” But if we compare ourselves to the Apostle Paul and the standard of living that he lived by, we have to conclude that he had us in mind when he wrote these verses.

Paul said in 6:8, “…if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.” That was his standard. Everything else was a luxury. Everything else that we own or pay for is a sign of wealth. And so, if you have the luxury of going on trips, or paying for internet, or owning a car or TV or phone; if you live above the standard of just having food and clothing, then this text is meant to speak to you.

The title of this sermon is **The Healthy Wealthy Christian**.

We will have three points today:

1. The Dangers of Wealth
2. The Blessings of Wealth
3. Final Instructions

(1) **THE DANGERS OF WEALTH**

Paul begins by addressing the rich in verse 17:

**17**As for the rich in this present age…

As he does so, he reminds them that their worldly wealth is temporary. He calls them “the rich *in this present age*”. There are several ages in God’s story of the world, and this is only one of them. The wealth that we own now only applies to this present age. It doesn’t carry over to the age to come.

When we leave this present age either by death or the return of Christ, none of the riches that we own will matter. We won’t get a credit to redeem our bank account balance in the new heavens and the new earth. If we are rich, we are only rich in this present age.

**17**As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty,

To the “rich in this present age”, Paul tells Timothy to “charge them not to be haughty”. He is to authoritatively command the rich to not be proud. The word “haughty” means to have high thoughts of yourself. It’s to think of yourself as more important, more valuable, and more worthy of admiration than others.

That is one of the dangers of wealth. It can make us believe that we’re better than others. It can give us an inflated sense of our own worth. This has spiritual implications. The Bible says that God opposes the proud. He gives grace to the humble but he opposes the proud because the proud steal his glory. The proud ascribe to themselves what he has given to them as a gift. They say, “Look at what my hands have built, the kingdom I have made, the wealth that I have accumulated.” They may not say it with their mouths, but they are thinking it in their minds, and the result is that they start trusting themselves more than the Lord. The Bible warns that God opposes such people, and he will either bring his judgment if they don’t belong to him, or his loving discipline if they do.

Pride also undermines our relationships with other people. Haughty thoughts cause division, because haughty people don’t want to associate with those who are beneath them. They only want to give their time to people they think are worth their time. I heard that a lot in Ontario’s courtrooms, but Paul is saying that it happens in churches as well. That’s one of the reasons why he wrote:

“Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly.” – Romans 12:16

As Christians, we’re not only called to associate with people who will advance our careers, or who will expand our business network. We’re meant to associate with the lowly, the weakest, the poor. That’s what Jesus did. He went to the blind, the crippled, and the poor. He welcomed the little children into his arms. He associated with the lowly because he wasn’t lofty in his thoughts of himself. Instead, he emptied himself of his eternal dignity and splendour and made himself nothing, so that those who are nothing in the eyes of the world might become infinitely precious in the sight of God.

And so, to the rich and wealthy in our church, I charge you to not be haughty, both for the sake of your relationship with God, and for the sake of the health of our church. Proverbs 16:18 says,

“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”

That’s true of individuals, and that’s true of churches. People suffer, and churches fall because of proud and haughty people. If we are going to see gospel culture in God’s household, we must guard ourselves from the pride and haughty spirit that would threaten to divide us.

Paul identifies another one of wealth’s dangers in verse 17:

**17**As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches,

The rich are charged not “to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches”. Their feelings of security about the future aren’t to come from what they possess or how much they own, because that’s a shaky foundation. It’s a foundation built on the uncertainty of riches: riches that can be lost, squandered, or stolen. If our hopes are set on the uncertainty of riches, then our hopes can be lost as well.

In his commentary on 1 Timothy, Philip Ryken tells a sobering story of a meeting in Chicago of nine of the world’s wealthiest men in 1923. In attendance were the presidents of the world’s largest steel, gas, and utility companies, the world’s greatest wheat speculator, the president of the New York Stock Exchange, a member of the presidential cabinet, a Wall Street tycoon, the head of the world’s largest monopoly, and the president of the Bank of International Settlements.

Within 25 years of that meeting, three died bankrupt, three committed suicide, two spent time in prison, and one went insane. Now, there are obviously countless examples of wealthy men and women who live and die in uninterrupted prosperity. But this story reminds us that it doesn’t always work out well for them. In fact, when the wealthy set their hopes on the uncertainties of riches, they may face a terrible fate.

**17**As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

Instead, we are to set our hopes on “God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy”. God is the one who provides for us, not ourselves. We may work for our wealth, but who gave you the gifts and skills that you used to earn your wealth? Who brought the right people at the right time into your life in order to help you prosper? Who gave you the health that you needed to work hard and long in order to succeed?” The answer is God. God is the one who richly provides for us, and so we do not boast.

There are echoes here of what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:7:

“What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?”

Everything we have, we have received from God, and he has given it to us not just to consume or to live on, but to *enjoy*. Paul isn’t advocating for asceticism. He isn’t telling the rich to divest themselves of their wealth and live as monks. Instead, he’s telling them to enjoy what they have by looking to God, who richly provides everything for them to enjoy.

That’s a much better foundation to build our hopes on than the uncertainties of riches, because God never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. With God, we don’t have to fear that he will be kind to us one day and cruel another. We don’t have to fear that he will keep his promises one day and break them another. He is eternally unchanging, perfect without variation, and he richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

This is the key to avoiding the dangers of wealth. It keeps us from becoming haughty, because haughtiness comes from the false belief that we are the source of our wealth. But we aren’t. God is the source of our wealth. God is the one who richly provides us with everything to enjoy, and so we do not become haughty, but humble.

We hope not in the provision but in the provider. Our provision may change, but our provider never will, and he will always provide us with everything that we need for his glory and for our joy.

(2) **THE BLESSINGS OF WEALTH**

Those are the dangers of wealth. Those are the pitfalls we need to avoid if we are to keep our riches in this present age from becoming our identity and source of hope. But what are the blessings of wealth? What opportunities do our riches in this present age give us to bless others to the glory of God? This leads to our second point.

Verse 18:

**18**They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share…

Notice the wordplay that Paul uses in this passage. Those who are “**rich** in this present age” are not to “set their hopes on the uncertainty of **riches**” but on God who “**richly** provides us with everything to enjoy”. And now he adds that they are to be “**rich** in good works”. The rich are to trust in the God of riches by investing in the true riches of good works.

This is what the rich life truly looks like. It doesn’t look like living in a mansion, or driving a luxury car, or going on expensive trips. That’s all fleeting. It’s all passing away along with this present age. What will never pass away is the investment we make in doing good works, in caring for others, in sharing what we have with those in need.

Once a month I speak at the Christian school in Newmarket where my children attend. We’ve been working through the New City Catechism together. This past Wednesday we reached Question 34, which asks:

Q. Since we are redeemed by grace alone, through Christ alone, must we still do good works and obey God’s Word?

I love the answer, which says:

Yes, because Christ, having redeemed us by his blood, also renews us by his Spirit; so that our lives may show love and gratitude to God; so that we may be assured of our faith by the fruits; and so that by our godly behavior others may be won to Christ.

This is why we do good works. It’s because Christ, having redeemed us by his blood, also renews us by his Spirit. The Spirit is at work changing our desires, reorienting our loves, so that we no longer live for ourselves but for Christ. He gives us a love for God that overflows in love for others that is expressed in good works. He makes us good trees that bear the good fruit of good works. And as he does, the good works of his people draw others to himself so that they also may learn to do good.

The Christian life is one that is devoted to good works. We’re not saved *by* those good works. But we are saved *for* those good works. Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:10:

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

You were created in Christ Jesus *for* good works. That’s true of every single Christian, whether you are a new Christian or a mature one; whether you grew up in a Christian home or you didn’t; whether you are living cheque by cheque or you have money to spare. All of us are saved by Christ *for* good works.

But it is the wealthy who have more opportunities for good, because they have more resources at their disposal. The servant with two talents produced two more, but the servant with five produced five more. Both were faithful, and both were commended by their master, but only the one who started with five was able to produce five more.

The wealthy have more talents than others, not just to invest for your own sake, but to invest for the sake of others as we do good works. You can be “rich in good works”.

Paul gives you a couple ideas of what that could look like in verse 18 when he says that you are to be “generous and ready to share”, but that’s just one example. The possibilities of being rich in good works is only limited by your imagination.

You can invest in pastoral education and training. You can find ways to serve the poor in our community in the name of Christ. You can support families that are facing the crisis of an unexpected pregnancy because they don’t think that they can afford to raise a child. Whatever it is, the important thing is that you’re investing your riches into what you were created in Christ Jesus to do: the good works that bring him glory.

Remember what Paul said earlier about the greedy false teachers earlier in Chapter 6. He said that they used godliness as a means of gain. But here we see the opposite. Philip Ryken writes:

“Instead of considering godliness as a means to gain, he wants them to use their gain as a means of godliness.”

Godliness isn’t a means of gain. Gain is a means of godliness as we use our gain to be rich in good works.

But there’s a surprise within this text. As Christians use their gain as a means of godliness, they will also reap the harvest of true, everlasting gain:

**18**They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, **19**thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

Verse 19 says that they are “storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life”. As they give of their earthly treasures, they’re laying up heavenly treasures. These treasures are not like the uncertain riches of this world that come and go. These treasures will serve as a “good foundation for the future”, not just for the present age but for the age to come.

This is what Jesus spoke of when he said we are to lay up treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal. Our good works are being counted by the Lord, not as a basis of our salvation – Christ alone is the basis of our salvation – but as a basis for our reward. Everyone who is in Christ will receive the free gift of eternal life, bought for us by the precious blood of Christ, and offered to us freely by grace, and grace alone. But each of us will receive our own reward as well for the good works we did in humble faith and dependence on the Lord.

It is by doing good that we take hold of that which is “truly life”. The more we give of our time, resources, and giftings, the more we will experience and enjoy the abundant life that Christ won for us in his death. Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Christ’s sake by doing good in his name will find it.

(3) **FINAL INSTRUCTIONS**

Paul ends this wonderful, Spirit-inspired letter with some final instructions, which leads to our third point.

**20**O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you.

In verse 20, Paul turns his attention once more to Timothy, his dear child in the faith and fellow worker in the gospel and writes, “O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you.” There’s no question that what Timothy is being called to guard is the gospel. In 1:11 Paul uses the same language in reference to the gospel:

“…in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.”

Similarly, 2 Timothy 1:10-12:

“…and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me.

The gospel is a sacred trust guarded by God himself, and he has appointed pastors to proclaim it and guard it alongside him. God appointed Paul, God appointed Timothy, and God has appointed every faithful pastor who has held true to the sound doctrine of the gospel.

There is nothing more important than this for faithful pastors and the churches they lead. They must guard the gospel. *We* must guard the gospel: the good news that Christ came into the world to save sinners by dying on the cross, bearing God’s wrath against us. In our place condemned he stood, so that by grace, we could be reconciled to God. God the Son was forsaken by God the Father, so that we could be adopted as his beloved sons and daughters and take hold of that which us truly life, both now and for eternity.

That is what we must guard. We must not change it, or modify it, or water it down to fit the culture. We must guard it. We must guard the gospel with all our lives, because only the gospel can save us from God’s judgment. Only the gospel can bring us into a loving relationship with God. Only the gospel can transform our relationships, communities, and churches and bring gospel culture into God’s household.

This means avoiding what would undermine the gospel:

**20**O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called “knowledge,” **21**for by professing it some have swerved from the faith.

We are to avoid “irreverent babble”, literally “godless chatter”, meaningless talk that sounds pious but is completely useless. There will always be teachers who claim to have secret knowledge, a missing key to unlocking your potential and happiness, but their so-called knowledge is not only false; it’s damning. People swerve from the faith by falling into their false claims.

The path to holiness and happiness will always be found in the same old place: the gospel of Christ crucified and risen again. And so, we must guard the gospel, we must protect this sacred truth that has been entrusted to us, so that those around us, and the generations that will come after us, will hear and believe as well.

Paul ends with these four precious words in verse 21:

**20**O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called “knowledge,” **21**for by professing it some have swerved from the faith. Grace be with you.

He switches from speaking in the second person singular in verse 20 to the second person plural in verse 21. He’s saying “Grace be with *you all*”. He’s offering this short prayer blessing, not just for Timothy, but for all who were part of Timothy’s church, that God’s grace would come to them, protect them, and sustain them as they live out their Christian faith in God’s household.

I can think of no better way to finish our series in 1 Timothy on Gospel Culture in God’s Household:

May God’s grace be with you all as you put your trust in Jesus Christ our Saviour.

May God’s grace be with you all as you train yourselves for godliness so that your lives reflect God’s glory.

May God’s grace be with you all as you care for the weak who are among us so that none are neglected or forgotten.

May God’s grace be with you all as you devote yourselves to being rich in good works so that many would praise our Father in heaven.

And may God’s grace be with you all as we guard the gospel that has been entrusted to us, until that blessed day when we finally stand in God’s heavenly household, our true everlasting home, where we will live together with him forever.