

## Lesson Six

GUARD YOURSELF!

I Timothy 6:1-21

WARN SLAVES

SECTION ONE 6:1, 2

**6** Let all who are under the yoke of slavery regard their masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be defamed. **2** Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brethren; rather they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their service are believers and beloved.

V. 1 Slavery permeated the ancient world. The sixty million of them made up one-half to three-fourths of the Roman empire. The **yoke** was that wooden harness used to hook together oxen as they pulled the plow; slaves were sometimes marched through the streets manacled together. Probably the term is used figuratively. To the **master** (lit., "despot"; one with absolute authority) his slave was nothing more than an intelligent animal which he owned. Even the Jew had a low view of the slave as reflected in the old Rabbinical prayer, "I thank Thee I was not born a woman, a slave, or a Gentile."

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Many slaves were highly educated and served as family tutors. A Christian slave would be strongly tempted to despise his pagan master. This attitude would not help the slave's lot and would destroy any influence his Christianity might otherwise have on his master. Paul gives similar instruction in Tit. 2:9, 10.

V. 2 If a Christian slave had a Christian master, he might think himself equal socially to his master and be disrespectful. Even though all men are equal in God's sight (Gal. 3:28), biological (women are mothers, men have larger muscles) and social distinctions (rich-poor, slave-master) yet exist. The N.T. always deals with problems realistically. Paul accepts these distinctions but exhorts us to bring Christ into them.

Since, in this instance, the master is a Christian and uses his money for God and others, if we profit him by our labor, the kingdom is being enriched.

Although the N.T. nowhere condemns slavery but rather regulates it, it ultimately brings about its destruction by the seed it sows. If the slave is my brother, dare I treat him as an animal or a thing?

Paul does not advocate a slave revolt. That would have resulted in slaughter as Spartacus learned in the first century B.C. when his revolt ended with 5,000 slaves crucified along the Appian Way. Nor did Paul suggest that masters free their slaves. To the Romans, that would have meant economic disaster and the church would have been classified as a political rabble-rousing group and its spiritual message ignored. But Paul does bring Christian love into slavery and just as the beauty of the lily makes more vivid the squalor of the swamp surrounding it, so Christian brotherhood graphically contrasted with the ugliness of slavery.

The N.T. says much about slavery. The Christian slave was exhorted to: (1) Abide in slavery without revolution (I Cor. 7:21-24); (2) Honor masters (I, 6:1, 2); (3) Work, not loaf (Col. 3:22; Eph. 6:5-8); (4) Not steal (Tit. 2:9, 10); (5) Obey the most irritable of masters (I Pet. 2:18-25; Lk. 17:7-10); (6) Not take advantage of a Christian master's goodness or faith (I, 6:2).

The Christian master was instructed to: (1) Realize all men were equal before God and slavery a man-made, social concept (Acts 17:26; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11); (2) Render just treatment for they too have a Master (Col. 4:1; Eph. 6:9); (3) Treat believing slaves as brothers (I Cor. 7:20-22; Phile. 10-22); (4) Be an example of a Christian. The book of Philemon was written to a slaveowner to whom Paul was returning a runaway slave. Notice that Paul never condemns the master nor asks for the release of the slave in so many words, but please catch the subtle implications Paul tucks into almost every verse.

Today, slavery of that sort is ended. But these principles still apply to us whether we are the "master" who employs, or the "wage slave" who works. Re-read the above commands and apply them to employer-employee situation. Paul's advice is yet sound!

## DISCUSSION STARTERS:

1. Could a man be a slave-owner and a Christian?
2. Can you make parallels between master-slave and employer-employee relationships?
3. Does Christianity sometimes cause us to mistakenly "look down on" those who are pagan?
4. Should our faith have anything to do with the way we are at work?

## WARN THE RICH

## SECTION TWO 6:3-10

Teach and urge these duties. 3 If any one teaches otherwise and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching which accords with godliness, 4 he is puffed up with conceit, he knows nothing; he has a morbid craving for controversy and for disputes about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, base suspicions, 5 and wrangling among men who are depraved in mind and bereft of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. 6 There is great gain in godliness with contentment; 7 for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world; 8 but if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content. 9 but those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs.

Slaves have nothing. That condition brings special temptations. But those who are free and rich also have tailor-made pitfalls. This craving for wealth appears to be the underlying motive that produces much of the character Paul now discribes.

V. 3 **sound** means "healthy" or "wholesome" and is the basis of our word "hygiene." Throughout these epistles Paul speaks of God's teachings as healthy and sound (1:10; 6:3; II, 1:13; 2:17; 4:3; Tit. 1:9; 2:1, 2, 8; cf. Heb. 5:12-14), and the false teaching as productive of gangrenous

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sores (2:17), weakness (4:7, 8), and a sickly appetite for arguing (6:4). Our attitude toward God's Word and His authority reveals to all our spiritual disposition and health.

V. 4 When one departs from God's Word, he follows a progressively downward trail. His arrogance blinds him to true knowledge and causes him to quarrel about opinions (cf. 1:4-7) as he is **sick** (lit., "of morbid craving"). He begins to think evil of those about him causing him to envy them and separate from them, to say slanderous things about them, to suspect them of evil motives, to rail at them — all symptoms of his **depraved** mind (lit., "wasted away") and heart empty of God's healing truth (cf. Jas. 3:13-18). His god has become gold. How many today get rich from the particular "ism" they hawk. The surprise is that so many sheep rush to them to be fleeced.

Vs. 6-8 True godliness is gain, but not in the worldly sense. Jesus possessed only a robe at His death. Paul had little more. Beware of those who preach Christianity as a way of gain. If God does permit wealth to come, use it wisely for Him. If not, do not think of your poverty as a mark of His displeasure. Paul knew from personal experience the ways of both wealth and poverty (Phi. 4:11-13). The real joys of life do not depend upon wealth. The song of a child, the smile of a friend, the glow of sunset, the coolness of water — all come without cost but all are without price! And what price God's love? Only fools live to build big grain bins (Lk. 12:20); the Christian hides his wealth in a safer place (Mt. 6:24-34).

V. 9 Notice that it is the "desire" or "lust" for money that is evil, not the money itself. A poor man who has this money-lust disease will find himself trapped as completely as the rich man who yet hungers for more. Paul combines five figures. (1) Money-lust is the enticing bait that lures us into the death trap. (2) Or it is the deceptive quicksand which appears solid but sucks us down to destruction.

V. 10 (3) It is a root which blooms with myriad temptations and forbidden fruits. Every sin imaginable has been motivated by greed. Paul is not saying that greed motivates every sin, but that it is a root or chief source of most.

(4) Money-love entices us from the strait path to glory and bids us wander in the meanderings of side-trails. (5) Money-love pierces us with wounds, as though we were pitched into the thorn bush, leaving us with strong discontent.

Why does a man pursue money? "To gain security and contentment," he answers. But the more wealth he gets, the more insecure he becomes as others seek to take it from him and he must surround himself with safeguards. His contentment also flees as he never has quite enough. When asked how much money is enough, one wealthy man sighed,

"Just a little bit more." Money lust is like drinking sea water, the more we drink, the more we crave! Only in God does one find real security and lasting contentment.

### DISCUSSION STARTERS:

1. Do you see a progression in the traits mentioned in verses 4 and 5? (cf. II Pet. 1:5-7)
2. Some teach, "God blesses Christians with riches." Do you agree? Can you name some poor Bible saints? Some rich ones?
3. How should a Christian regard money? Is it wrong to be ambitious and seek better paying jobs?
4. Is there any sin man hasn't committed for money? Would you agree that money is the prime source of most sin?
5. Why do people crave money? When they get money, do they satisfy these cravings?

### WARN YOURSELF

#### SECTION THREE 6:11-21

11 But as for you, man of God, shun all this; aim at righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. 12 Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 13 In the presence of God who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, 14 I charge you to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ; 15 and this will be made manifest at the proper time by the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 who alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.

17 As for the rich in this world, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on uncertain riches but on God who richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy. 18 They are to do good, to be rich in good deeds, liberal and generous, 19 thus laying up for themselves a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life which is life indeed.

20 O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you. Avoid the

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godless chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge, 21 for by professing it some have missed the mark as regards the faith.

Grace be with you.

V. 11 Timothy is given a title, **man of God**, that was applied to Moses (Deut. 33:1) and the prophets (I Sam. 2:27; 9:6; I Kings 12:22). He is to follow in their steps! They spoke boldly God's Word without regard to consequences. They kept themselves free from money-love. They endured hardship. They walked with God!

Timothy is to "flee" (lit.) those evils mentioned, and to "follow after" (lit.) these Christian virtues. To only shun evil produces a vacuum. The purpose of cleaning out is to enable the Lord to fill up. Godliness is not a matter of not doing evil, but of replacing it with positive good.

The first three items listed deal primarily with God — righteousness, godliness, faith. The second three with others — love, patience, gentleness. These gleaming pearls in our life make us truly rich!

V. 12 The fight (lit., "agony") of faith reminds us that godliness comes with effort (1:18). The figure is that of a soldier or an athlete. **Take hold** may be a continuation of this image, that of a wrestler getting a better grip. The **good confession** that Jesus is Savior and Lord was made by Timothy at his baptism. Marriage vows help us to keep marriage strong amidst temptation. Christian vows, especially that first one made at baptism, should strengthen our continuing effort.

V. 13 Paul again (5:21) pictures a courtroom as he makes this formal charge to Timothy to discharge his duties. Jesus, while undergoing persecution, made a confession of faith before a judge and others (Lk. 23:3). This suggests that Timothy will have his confession tested by persecution and that he should be as bold as his Lord even if it meant painful death. Speak out for God! "Silence is not always golden; sometimes it's just plain yellow."

V. 14 We not only look backwards to Christ's example, we also look forward to His coming. Then, He was judged; the next time, He will judge.

V. 15 Only God knows when will be the **proper time** (Mt. 24:36). Many have wasted much time and have made Christianity appear foolish in the eyes of the world by their constant confident affirmations of the time of His coming. Let us live each day as if it were that Day. When He comes, all authorities will crumble before Him and He will be crowned King of kings (Phil. 2:10, 11; Rev. 17:14; 19:16).

V. 16 God is always characterized by blinding light, a symbol of purity and power. No one has seen God (Jn. 1:18) although Moses saw His "afterglow" (Ex. 33:17-23) which left his face radiant for a time. Paul was

blinded by the light on the Damascan way (Acts 9). Israel was led from captivity by a pillar of fire. Someday we may see God, but if we have "seen" Jesus, we have glimpsed the essential quality of our Father (Jn. 14:9).

Vs. 17, 18 Paul returns to his earlier theme of verses 6-10. There he warned about the greed which perverted the lives and teachings of those who desired money. Now he directs Timothy to warn those church members who had wealth not to value their gold more than God. Some Christians were well off; one was even treasurer of the city of Corinth (Rom. 16:23). When one has money, he tends to be proud. Too often, he doesn't have money, money has him.

Paul plays on the word riches. Don't trust in riches which may make one poorer spiritually, but trust in good deeds which make one eternally rich. The Israelites were not the last to worship a golden calf (Col. 3:5). Most of our advertising is designed to make us covetous. We dare not let down our guard against the temptation. As one noted, "What a man goes after here will determine where he goes hereafter."

V. 19 Gifts given to God are not lost. If our treasure is on earth, someday we must leave it. If our treasure is above, then someday we are going to it. Even a cup of water given in His name is of greater value than a mountain of gold in that Day (Mt. 25:35).

V. 20 Paul ends his letter with an exhortation to his son. He is fearful lest his boy wander from the way. He pictures Timothy as a soldier protecting a valuable deposit or treasure (II, 1:14). The treasure is God's message which must not be stolen nor transmuted. The **godless chatter** and other false teachings were thieves which would steal the treasure from his very heart if he let down his guard. Some lose their faith by letting it get crowded out with foolish things (Mk. 4:19). Others are so impressed by the **knowledge** (so called) of the world that they surrender faith's treasure without a fight. A learned fool goes to hell as completely as a stupid fool. Guard your treasure, Timothy!

(Paul's last word, **you**, is plural in Greek showing that this epistle was written not only to Timothy but to the whole Ephesian church.)