

BaptistWay Bible Series for July 9: Investigate your heart's desire

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Investigate your heart's desire

- 1 Timothy 6:2-16

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Bill Gates and Warren Buffett made the news recently. Gates announced he would soon step down from overseeing the operations at Microsoft and dedicate himself to his charitable foundation. Buffett will donate in excess of \$30 billion to philanthropic ventures (much of that given to Gates' foundation).

I don't know the spiritual condition of either person, but what a gesture. They are doing the very thing Paul told Timothy to teach the rich (1 Timothy 6:18). You may protest, "Well, they can afford to give away billions and still have billions." Admittedly, this is an extreme example. After all, they are the world's first- and second-richest men. But it would be wrong to suggest one must have billions (or millions) in order to be generous. Besides, Paul did not condemn wealth. He condemned an unhealthy desire to gain wealth.



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In his final comments, Paul charged Timothy to offer correct teaching regarding wealth. In those comments, he addressed the false teachers' wrong motives for godliness (6:3-5), listed the dangers associated with unhealthy attitudes toward wealth (vv. 6-10), warned Timothy against such temptations and exhorted him to righteous living (vv. 11-17), and advised Timothy on what to teach those who were rich. These words are as timely today as they were when Paul first penned them.

False teachers (6:3-5)

As previously in the letter, Paul used a characterization of false teachers as preface to his instructions to Timothy. Verse 3 opens with a hypothetical—"If anyone teaches false doctrines ..."—but the situation at Ephesus hardly was hypothetical.

False teachers were present. Paul used this device simply to offer up a description of them. Here the list is long again of the many errors of the false teachers (vv. 4, 5). Anyone who teaches what is contrary to sound Christian doctrine is both arrogant and ignorant ("conceited and understands nothing," v. 4).

Further, the results of their activity are many, but they can be summed up briefly: They bring controversy that leads to disruption. One characteristic serves as Paul's transition to the topic he addresses in the remainder of the

letter. The false teachers believe godliness is only a means to securing financial gain (v. 5). That their teaching was riddled with error wasn't their only problem; their motive for godliness was wrong, as well.

Unhealthy attitude toward wealth (6:6-10)

Paul defined true gain: it was godliness with contentment. Financial gain, though not wrong in itself, does not bring contentment. It doesn't go with us when we die (v. 8).

Paul declared we should be content with food and clothing. The point is, if our needs are met, we should be content. The struggle nowadays is grasping the difference between our needs and our wants.

Paul then went on to warn that people who desire wealth face temptations. Even ruin and destruction can result.

At the heart of Paul's comment is an axiom often misquoted: "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (v. 10). He did not say money was the root of all evil. Money is a medium of exchange and a tool; it is neither good nor evil. It is the love of money that is the problem. Some who loved money, Paul illustrated, wandered from the faith and encountered many griefs.

Exhortation and encouragement for Timothy (6:11-16)

In light of those dangers, Paul exhorted Timothy to "flee from all this" (v. 11). The drive for wealth should not characterize Timothy's life and work. Rather, he should follow a six-fold higher pursuit—righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.

Paul then repeated his earlier command to Timothy: "Fight the good fight

of the faith” (v. 12; see 1:18). Perhaps as a direct comment on the false teachers’ misplaced value on money, Paul commanded Timothy to take hold of the eternal life to which he was called. He also encouraged him to do these things until the appearing of Christ (v. 14). The reference to the coming of Christ, which God would bring about in his own time, caused Paul to break out in doxology (vv. 15-16).

A word to the rich (6:17-19)

Paul did not call for the wealthy to repent of anything; he did not tell Timothy to confiscate the wealth of the rich. Rather, he provided clear instruction on the proper attitude toward their wealth. The rich should avoid arrogance and should not put their hope in their wealth. Money is not certain; it can be here one day and gone the next. Just follow the stock market to see. Sooner or later, we and our wealth eventually will be parted (one need only be reminded of verse 7). The only certain hope is God, for he is the provider.

Paul required two things of the rich—doing good deeds and being generous to share with others (v. 18). With language that echoes Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:19-21), Paul offered assurance such generosity would lead to treasures for the coming age. The rich, then, would take hold of what is “truly life” (v. 19).

Perhaps the Gates/Buffett example is not extreme after all. For it is not about one’s wealth; it is about one’s desire for wealth. The object of our desire is what matters. Your money or your God, Jesus said as much (Matthew 6:24).

Discussion questions

- What are the signs indicating that money has taken priority in our lives over God?
- How do we identify and avoid the “temptations” and “trap” Paul mentions (v. 9)?
- What are ways we can show generosity with our money?
- What kinds of evil can result from the love of money?



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