

The sermon

Intro

We're at the end of 1 Timothy. My goal has been to see God's good and perfect design for the local church. We were saved for structured community. 1 Timothy discusses church life.

And we've seen much about biblical spirituality. Loving God rather than money. Pursuing righteousness, godliness, love, etc.

Clinging to the faith passed down by the apostles. Not adding to it. Not taking from it. Not departing from it.

As we conclude we'll look at riches and Satan's lies once again.

READ PASSAGE

Body

Point 1: The perils of riches (6:17)

As for the rich in this present age,

Who are the rich?

Who are the rich? What does it mean to be rich? An interesting observation is the Bible has much to say about the poor. And we see the wealthy addressed with some frequency in Scripture. But we never hear about a middle class. We only hear about the poor and the rich.

Why is this? Well it's not that the middle class doesn't exist. I think we hear a lot about the poor because they are a people in need. To be in need is not a good place to be. And those with excess are in a position to alleviate that need. The poor are frequently mentioned because there's opportunity to honor God in caring for the poor. And in James, because there's temptation to look down on the poor. And sometimes the poor are so because of the corruption and power of the rich. In Isaiah wealthy people were paying off corrupt judges to steal the family land of the middle class who then became poor because of injustice. God cares about this. So we hear a lot about the poor because they're frequently sinned against and because there's opportunity to obey God in caring for the poor.

As for the rich, we hear about the rich because there's temptation to favor the rich and look down on the poor (James) and the rich abuse the poor (Isaiah) and the rich refuse to repent and believe because they love their money and possessions (rich young ruler). And in 1 Timothy, we hear about people departing from the faith because they crave wealth. So we hear a lot about the rich because of sinful actions and sinful attitudes related to wealth.

Back to my question, **who are the rich?** In Isaiah, the wicked rich are those who have money to bribe judges (1:23; 5:23), take from the poor (3:14-15), possess fine clothing, jewelry, and perfume (3:18-23), and own multiple large and beautiful homes and fields (5:8-9). In James, the rich are those who wear fine clothing (2:3), unjustly oppress believers by dragging them into court (2:7), possess riches and garments (5:2), possess gold and silver (5:3), fraudulently hold back wages from their employees (5:4), and live in luxurious self-indulgence (5:5).

Moral considerations aside, the rich are people with abundance. Abundant money, abundant possessions (e.g., jewelry), abundant lands, abundant homes. They're people with capacity for fine tastes. They're people who have more than they need. They're people in position to help the poor.

I would conclude you don't have to be an athlete that makes \$50 million a year to be rich. If you can't pay your bills as is, you're in the category poor. That's where the true widow is. If you can pay your bills as is, but you don't have excessive funds or possessions or properties and you don't have the capacity for fine tastes, you're neither poor nor rich. If you have a lot of money sitting around and a lot of possessions and properties and the capacity for fine tastes, you're probably rich. Of course there's varying levels of poverty and various levels of riches. And some in the middle class are better off than others.

So that's a brief theology of poverty and wealth.

charge them not to be haughty,

The first peril is haughtiness. Pride, arrogance. An attitude. The idea that I'm better than you because I drive a nicer car.

The rich, like the poor, face unique temptations. The poor person might be tempted to steal or go after a get rich quick scheme. Paul assumes the rich are tempted to become haughty. With wealth come opportunities that the average Joe doesn't have. This can lead to a feeling of superiority.

When a celebrity struts out with a \$20,000 suit, they communicate look at me. Look how great I am. For those of us who aren't multi-millionaires, but have excess, there's the temptation to boast in our cars or our campers or our kitchen renovation.

It's all about identity. Am I a born again, justified, child of God? Or am I my bank account or my jewelry collection? The rich are tempted to think I am my possessions. If we think like this, we might conclude I'm better than my brothers and sisters in Christ.

nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God,

Wealth can lead to misplaced hopes. Christian, our hope is God. Not our stuff.

In the present age, our hope remains God's provision, not our bank account. The bank account is uncertain. The market can tank. The 401K can drop sharply. Recession can hit. Another depression isn't impossible. A global economy multiplies the number of risks.

A profitable business can become a dinosaur because of constant, relentless innovation. Blockbuster, a movie rental chain, was a money-maker that dried up. Blockbuster was a multi-billion dollar company that peaked in 2004 with 9,094 stores. In 2010, Blockbuster filed for bankruptcy. By 2014, Blockbuster was down to 300 stores, most of which closed that year with a few remaining open. By 2019, Blockbuster was down to one store in Oregon.

Wealthy people are tempted to trust in their riches rather than God. But the economy is unstable and its future unknown. God's promises are fixed and sure and certain and revealed.

Wealth can lead to haughtiness. Wealth can lead to misplaced hopes.

Point 2: The positives of riches (6:17-19)

who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

We've had the perils. Here's the positives.

The wealthy, just like the poor and the middle class, are provided for by God. It's appropriate for the rich to pray "*Give us this day our daily bread*" (Matt 6:11).

And God doesn't provide for just survival. He provides for enjoyment too. It's okay for rich people to use their wealth for personal enjoyment.

Life isn't just survival. Life isn't just waiting for Jesus to return. Life isn't just serving in the church and evangelism. There's room in life for enjoying God's good creation. A rich person can travel to Florida or France without remorse and guilt. A wealthy person can own a lake cottage and use it to God's glory. One reason God gives wealth is for personal enjoyment.

There's many areas where enjoyment can be had. A list isn't provided.

They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, – 6:18

There's freedom to enjoy. There's obligation to share. "*to do good, to be rich in good works*" is "*to be generous and ready to share.*"

"generous" = not giving the scraps, not being stingy. A good amount.

"ready to share" = eager. Not because someone's holding a gun to your head or the pastor's beating you with the Bible. Because you want to. Readiness suggests on the lookout. Knowing who's out there. Knowing how they're doing. Knowing what's needed.

Percentages aren't provided. It's on a case by case basis. In Ephesus, the church supported true widows. If these widows were to be provided for, generosity had to occur. A loose grip on wealth allows for good works.

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. – 6:19

When a rich person is generous, they store up a different sort of treasure. A treasure that's lasting and not uncertain like the stock market.

The idea seems to be unspecified eternal rewards that enhance the rich person's experience of heaven. It's not that they earn heaven by giving away money. No, we attain eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ who died on the cross to purchase our redemption.

As the rich person gives generously to others (and to the church – at the very least to support pastors who labor in teaching and preaching and true widows), they build a foundation of treasure they will experience in the future. In doing so, they take hold of, grasp, seize of true life.

Taking hold of true life is both present and future. The idea is a person experiences true life today when they give away wealth. Life isn't accumulating stuff. Life isn't getting your bank account to the point where you'll never have to trust God again. Life isn't getting an expensive car so that you can think you're better than other people. No, life is loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark

12:30). One way we love God is by using our money in a way that pleases him. Giving generously is living by faith.

So money isn't all bad. God provides money. God provides money for our enjoyment. God provides money so we can help others and support the local church's ministry. And as we use our money by faith, we experience life today and we store up eternal rewards for the future.

What about having wealth?

A question came up, what about the person who didn't make it their life goal to become a millionaire, who served God rather than money, but somehow through God's providence found themselves possessing significant wealth?

There's no sin in having wealth. These Christians aren't rebuked for having wealth. They're warned about common temptations, they're told to enjoy their wealth, and they're told to share their wealth.

Putting the data together, I conclude that we should never make it our aim to acquire wealth. Wealth can't be the god we serve. But if we have ambition and develop skills and God prospers us with a sizable income, we give thanks to God for his provision. We don't crave wealth, but if God should happen to give us wealth, we then use that wealth for his glory. It's okay for my son to get a college degree and then get a \$100,000 job so he can provide for a family comfortably. To want to provide for a family is a good goal. To want a bunch of money so he can buy every new gadget that comes out without restraint isn't commendable. Motives matter.

Dude Perfect

My children love Dude Perfect. Some YouTubers who do trick shots, weird sports competitions, stereotype videos, etc. They profess Christ and keep their content clean. They were just a group of college kids who made a video shooting basketball shots off roofs, etc. and it took off. I don't think they put out the video hoping to become millionaires. But, in God's providence, that's what happened. They shouldn't feel guilty for their wealth. But now, having been prospered by God, they find themselves stewards. Free to enjoy their wealth and fund gospel ministry and share with those who have less.

Point 3: The perils of false belief systems (6:20-21)

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. – 6:20-21

The deposit entrusted to Timothy is the gospel. Timothy must protect the gospel. He can't add to it. He can't take away from it. The Christian faith can't be altered.

The problem is there's a lot of lies being promoted in and around the church. "irreverent babble" is godless empty talk. The thoughts of men with zero substance. Contradictions are ideas that don't mesh. Those who warn people about mental health while saying follow your heart. How can I follow my heart when there's something wrong with me? False belief systems are considered knowledge, but they contradict themselves.

Sometimes it's worth debating. At other times, it's not even worth our time. Paul warns Timothy not to get bogged down in discussing falsehoods. There's truth to teach, people to shepherd, widows to care for, and disciples to be made. Not worth your time.

Sometimes people swerve from the truth when they give an ear to godless empty talk. Today we call it deconstruction. Young people departing from the gospel in favor of manmade contradictions with zero substance.

Gospel

The Christian faith is the antidote for broken humanity. The gospel has substance.

Our problem is sin. We fail to thank God and we chose to do life our own way. Following our own heart is a bad thing!

God provided remedy for our plight through Jesus Christ who died on the cross.

That whoever believes in Jesus would not face judgment but rather experience forgiveness of sins and eternal life. On the cross God treated Jesus as if he lived our sinful life. If we trust in Jesus, God treats us as if we lived Jesus' perfect, sinless life.

On the third day, Jesus was raised from the dead, vindicating his claims. It's not empty talk! We serve a risen Savior!

There's two ways to live. We can go on rejecting God and living our own way. Or we can humble ourselves by confessing our sins and asking for forgiveness and trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection and joyfully submitting to God's rule.

If we turn from our rebellion and believe, we're totally forgiven of every sin we've ever committed and we're born again with a new heart to fight sin. We're remade. We're on the path of true life. Living according to our design, not against it. We were created to know and love and serve God.

Conclusion

"Grace be with you (plural)" indicates 1 Timothy was read to the whole church. The church needs God's empowering grace to get the ship steered in the right direction.

Palermo Christian Church needs God's grace to make new disciples and function as God intends.