

Study Notes for [1 Timothy 6:1-10](#)

CULTIVATING CONTENTMENT

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Introduction:

In the first part of the passage, (vv. 1-2a) Paul addresses Christian slaves and how they are to behave with regard to their owners so that the message of the church will not be hindered. Two things worth noting are that a high percentage of the population was enslaved and as a result many members of the church were slaves; second, first century Greek/Roman slavery should not be equated with early American slavery. Slavery at the time of Paul had little to do with race and the possibility of freedom always existed. However, slaves were still at the lowest rung of society, were considered the poor and weak and were “owned” by their masters. The Gospel preached good news to the poor and freedom for those in bondage – good news indeed to the slaves. When both slave and master became Christians, this no doubt created unique tensions. Whether the false elders were trying to take advantage of these tensions is unclear but certainly a possibility.

In the second part of the passage (vv. 2b-10) Paul recommissions Timothy in his role regarding Paul’s teaching in this letter. Since the letter would be read by everyone in the church, this is also an implied endorsement of Timothy by Paul to the church leaders and members. Paul then once again address his concerns about the false elder/teachers. The problems that this group had caused the church was enormous and was never far from Paul’s concerns. In particular he singles out their desire for wealth a particular problem.

Annotated Outline

1. Instructions to slaves (vv. 1-2a)
 - i. Paul now addresses Christian slaves in general. They are to honor their masters so that God’ name and the teaching of Paul and Timothy will not be hindered.
 - ii. Then Paul addresses Christian slaves specifically who have Christian masters. They are not to take advantage of this situation; instead they are to honor their masters more because they are brothers in Christ.
2. Final summary and indictment against the false elder/teachers (vv. 2b-10)
 - i. Now Paul again instructs Timothy with regard to his role concerning all the things he has told him in this letter. Paul also includes in his instructions the gospel: the “sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Those people who disagree with this “understand nothing” and have a “morbid interest” in futility.
 - ii. Such people think they can get rich through their relationship with Christ and of course one *is* rich in relationship with Christ but not in the way they think; it is through being content with what one is given; and one does not need to have much – just food and clothing. Those who want more cause themselves and others much grief.

Notes

6:1 “under the yoke of slavery” is redundant; someone who is a slave is also “under the yoke.” The fact that Paul is emphasizing the “yoke” most likely means that for slaves who have become Christians, slavery is a problem. They had hoped for complete freedom from bondage. As Fee states, “it may be a Pauline reminder to the believing slaves that even though their status in Christ is that of freedmen, they are otherwise still in the old social order” (Fee, 137).

It also seems odd to us the Paul would encourage Christian slaves to honor their master even though their masters may be pagans. However, the general teaching of the NT concerning Christian behavior is always one of being a servant (Mark 10:43-45; Galatians 5:13; Ephesians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:16-17) and that a Christian’s hope is not in their present condition but in the final status and condition to come. The present condition is therefore irrelevant (1 Corinthians 7:17-24, 29-31). Because of this hope, and despite painful exploitation, Christians can still live in loving obedience.

“masters” – the owner of the slaves.

“slandered” (NIV) “reviled” (ESV) – Paul is very concerned about how the church is viewed from the outside. Paul’s fear was that as a result of the behavior of the Christian slaves the outside world would “slander” the “name of God” and the message of the Gospel itself. (See Isaiah 52:5 and Romans 2:24). As Towner states, “Ultimately, Christian slaves who are held to be disruptive or insubordinate could damage the church’s witness (cf. Titus 2:9-10) (Towner, 382).

6:2a This was likely the crux of the problem: Christian slaves were already showing disrespect to their Christian masters (i.e. were not accepting the authority of their Christian masters over them) and this was obvious for all (including those outside the church) to see. Paul turns their argument on its head by stating that precisely because they are brothers they should be treated with respect. Paul even goes so far to tell the Christian slaves that their Christian masters are “dear” (NIV) or “beloved” (NASB, ESV). To whom are the Christian masters “dear” – it can either be to the slaves (NIV) or to God; both are likely meant here.

Another question in this text is who is benefiting whom. Are the masters benefitting by the service of the slaves (NIV) or are the slaves benefitting from the devotion of the masters (TNIV)? It is most likely the former.

6:2b Paul urges Timothy one more time to teach and preach “these things.” (NIV; see also 3:14; 4:16, 11; 5:7, 21) Where “these things” include everything from 5:3 to 6:2.

6:3-5 In contrast to “these things” that Timothy is to teach and preach, the false teachers are preaching a different doctrine. vv. 3 to 5 is one conditional sentence. Verse 3 is the “if” part, and states what the false teachers are not doing; verses 4 to 5 is the “then” part, and contains the results of the false teachers’ actions.

“anyone” in verse 3 refers specifically to the false elder/teachers.

“sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ” (NIV) refers to the gospel which is the “doctrine conforming to godliness” (NASB).

Verses 4 through 5 describe the results of those who have turned their back on the gospel. They are first of all “conceited and understand nothing” and second they are far too interested in “controversies and quarrels about words.”

The greed of the false teachers is most disruptive within the church and so Paul addresses the relationship between money and godliness directly.

“deprived of the truth” – notice the irony; those men who desired to get rich only ended up being deprived of truth.

- 6:6 This verse contrasts directly with the previous one. “who think” (the false elder/teachers) that there is great gain in godliness. Well they are correct, there is. But it is not the kind of “gain” that they supposed – it is not monetary and godliness must be combined with contentment; that is, satisfied with whatever position and whatever possessions one has.

Now this “contentment” is not based on *self*-sufficiency but *Christ*-sufficiency (Philippians 4:13) (Fee, 143). For Paul, contentment is all based on the grace of God and not one what one does or earns.

- 6:7-8 In these two verses Paul gives two reasons why godly contentment brings “great gain (v. 6).” The first has to do with our inevitable death and that we can take nothing with us. And if we can take nothing with us it makes no sense to be working towards great material wealth. This is the same point Job also made (“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return.”)

Paul then gives the second reason for being content: if we have enough to eat and we can cloth ourselves we have enough. This was also the teaching of Jesus (Luke 12:22-32; Matthew 6:25-34).

In making these statements Paul makes it clear that godliness in and of itself is the greatest gain but that true godliness is always accompanied by a contentment that is satisfied by the basic needs of life; a person with this type of attitude to life is definitely not greedy (Fee, 144).

- 6:9-10 Paul now speaks to all the members of the Ephesian church when he says that the desire for monetary wealth will only result in despair. The result of greed is always destruction; that is spiritual ruin.

In verse 10 Paul quotes a well-know Greek proverb. In it he states again that the desire for (“love of”) money is the root of the problem (it is not money itself as is often misquoted). Although the KJV is closest to the Greek (“the love of money is the root of all evil”), Paul is not stating here that all evil has as its origin the love of money; he is simply quoting a proverb. Now, the proof-in-the-pudding is that one does not have to look far to see this proverb worked out in peoples lives. This was certainly the case in the Ephesian church. It is a clear warning to all that Satan uses money to entice and entrap us so that our desire for it causes us to even “wander away from the faith.”

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