

Rich in Good Works

Let us turn to our Bibles to 1st Timothy chapter 6. 1st Timothy chapter 6, verses 17 to 19. Let us listen attentively to the word of God. 1st Timothy 6, 17.

Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches, but in a living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they may be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life. Let us pray.

Here, God, we read Paul urging Timothy to deal with a matter in the churches there, a matter of the rich, who apparently, some of them, or too many of them, were haughty, and put too much of their trust in the riches of this world. Lord, they needed to be rich in good works. May this be a lesson for all of us.

Indeed, Lord God Almighty. For we know that even if we are poor, we can still be rich in good works, even though we may feel limited compared to the rich and the wealthy. God Almighty, it matters not.

But indeed, Lord, may we learn from this text that all of us are called thereby, and to know that we are indeed blessed, and that blessing comes from you, and we ought to share others with that blessing. We ask this in your name alone. Amen.

In the time of Jesus and Paul, the vast majority of people in the Roman Empire were poor or slaves. What we know as the middle class today was much, much smaller back then, and the rich were a smaller group yet. Interestingly, although a small group, they show up in the New Testament more often than one may think.

We read about the wealthy and a warning of the wealthy in Jesus' famous statement, And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. He also instructed the rich young ruler who walked away sad. In James 2.3 we read, And you pay attention to one wearing fine clothes, and say to him, Sit here in a good place.

And say to the poor man, You stand there. Later on, he says, Sit here at my footstool, in fact. But you have dishonored the poor man, James says.

Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts. And even the book of Revelation gives a warning to rich Christians. Because you say, I am rich, I have become wealthy, and I have need of nothing.

Do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. And we have Paul here in writing to the young pastor Timothy to have special care to remind the rich in the church, the wealthy people in the church, to reprioritize the use of their wealth that they as believers would edify one another. So let's look at this admonition to see how it is still relevant for us today.

Rich Christians Should not be Haughty

Verse 17, Rich Christians should not be haughty or prideful. It is a command we read here, We command those who are rich, he tells young Timothy, directing the pastor herein, to warn them not to be consumed by wealth, but rather to be consumed by godliness and good works. It's a call of church leaders, thereby, are here to shepherd, to shepherd the flock.

And although we think of the word shepherd as a picture of idyllic pleasantness in a field, shepherds have rods for a reason. Now, in this case, he's not saying give them church discipline, but he is using the verbal rod to protect, to warn, to encourage, and to exhort the rich among them to be rich in good works. And that exhortation from Timothy doesn't have to be from the pulpit, it could be in person, it could be in small groups, it doesn't matter.

And indeed, it may be for all of us, in fact, to do this when needed. Who are the rich? It's a question that sometimes vexes people in the American system we have capitalism, and the theory is we can all conceivably be rich and we're not because of our own laziness or something like that. The way I look at it is from a historical perspective and a practical description of poverty and riches.

The poor, I have in my mind, as those drowning in the ocean of life, we would say they have subsistence living. They're barely getting by, we may say, if they're getting by at all. The rich, on the flip side, are relaxing in the yacht of life, have extra money, extra time, and don't have to worry about food the next day at all.

And then in the middle, which is pretty broad, you have everybody else, we might call middle class, or kind of rich-poor, or poor-rich or something, and they don't think in those terms, and they don't talk that way in the ancient Near East because there was so much poverty. Everywhere. So you're pretty much poor-rich in the old days.

By God's grace, we have a lot of in the middle here in America, although unfortunately it is fading away for various and sundry reasons. Now in this application context, the way I look at it is anybody with extra money and resources are called to, therefore, to that extent, to be rich in good works. You may not be rich compared to what riches are in America, the billionaire, the millionaire, the multi-millionaire and the like, people who own businesses or something, big businesses, but by God's grace, you have perhaps, it depends, I know, enough wealth that you can still be useful.

So this text, in other words, is still applicable to you. As long as you're not living off of subsistence living, and you have a little bit of extra something, although he mentions wealth here, I think we can all agree he means more than wealth as well, but especially wealth, we are called thereby to follow this to the best of our ability. Christ tells us, to whom much is given, much is required.

There's another way of looking at this. And so the rich, therefore, have a greater responsibility because a lot of good works are done and use resources and time and even money to get things done. That's just how God designed it.

We have to live in an economy, we have to live in a house, we have to have a job, we have to have food, something like that. So money is going to play a factor somewhere in that category. Of course, wealth would include land.

That's not money as such, but it's something that could be used to help others. That's why I believe Paul means more. Remember the history there in the book of Acts, where they even sold land to get money to help people.

So the middle class can often do something. It may not be worth money. It could be your time, your effort, and your experience.

Now, of course, it begins with the heart. Let them not be haughty. All sanctification begins in the heart.

It's a New Testament emphasis, of course. And not every text emphasizes this point. He doesn't explicitly say it here, but obviously the idea here is not to be haughty, but on the flip side, what? To be humble, and to be loving, and to be helpful, beginning in the heart.

They're holding back if they are depending and trusting. He says here, trust, again, a heart activity. In uncertain riches, it's clearly a heart matter with them.

If you are a believer, you do have faith in Christ. That's true. And now you need to exercise your will to seek out good works, and not to rest and rely upon wealth.

It begins in the heart. Now, being rich has temptations in its own right, as he mentions here. Riches in this present age, not to be haughty, that's one temptation.

Not to trust in uncertain riches, that's another temptation. Because having so much wealth, if I want to broaden the options and categories of temptations and weaknesses, for the rich, you're so rich that you don't need to work. You can see that would slide into laziness, perhaps.

Or being a busybody. There's a danger of being a busybody, in fact. That's a warning in the New Testament.

Or the younger generation. We think of the stereotypical rich brat, who doesn't feel like he has to do anything, because he's rich, he's got all the money. Everything can be fixed by Papa.

He can pay off the police or something. So, to fight these temptations, whatever they may be for the rich, it begins with humility, not haughtiness and pride. So trust here, is emphasized, that is negatively, of course, shouldn't be trusting in uncertain riches.

Rather, trust in the living God, who what? Gives us these very good riches and prosperity and money and good things in this world. Riches, but in the living God. Trust not in uncertain riches, but what? Trust, is the implied verb.

In the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. You can't be haughty when you realize, what I have, the good things I have, the nice suit I have, the house I have, the large land I have, and the cars I have, are from God Almighty. And without His will, I would never have gotten them.

Now, what he points out here, don't have trust in uncertain riches. I think there's two ways of looking at this, idea of trusting in uncertain riches, or two types of trusting in general, doesn't have to be riches, just anything in this world. You can take it as an ultimate sense, or in a relative sense.

By ultimate sense, I mean, if they're trusting in wealth over God, if they believe in the God of mammon, and they replace God for riches, that's a clear violation of the first commandment, and they're not Christians. They're literally saying, I don't care about God, I care about things in this world, I'm my own God, or I follow Baal, and it's all about money. I don't submit to Jesus, I don't care about Jesus, I don't have a God, except my God is money.

That's clearly not a Christian. Somebody says that, they act that way, you're like, what's going on, this guy's not a Christian. Is that who Paul's talking to here? Is he saying, you guys are a bunch of believers who trust, that is an absolute sense, and completely violate the first commandment, and don't really have God as your God? I don't think so.

He's writing to them, because they are believers, but they're struggling, they're falling into sin. God is still their God, but their actions are weak, and have blurred the lines. So in a relative sense, you can have too much trust with things in this world, and the Christian context of sanctification.

Otherwise, if you take an absolute sense, they're literally not a Christian, because a believer believes in God. It doesn't replace the first commandment with anything else. So I take it as a relative sense, this is something we all struggle with, and in particular here, and perhaps elsewhere in other sins related like this, we have, I think, a helpful description in the larger catechism question 105.

Larger catechism question 105 on the first commandment describes this violation I'm talking about of a relative trust, too much trust, relatively speaking, of things in this world, or too much love, or too much passion, or too much whatever. We read here, what are the sins forbidden in the first commandment? It goes on, of course, it says atheism, you just simply deny that God exists. That's a clear violation of the first commandment.

Idolatry, it's its own category in the first commandment, where you have literal other gods replacing the Lord God Almighty, or in addition to the Lord God Almighty, which you see a lot of in Hosea and the Old Testament. But you continue on here, and it's not in a different category, it doesn't use a name for it, it just talks about self-love, self-seeking, and all other inordinate, that is excessive, and immoderate, not moderated, setting of our mind, will, or affections, upon other things, and taking them off from Him in whole or in part. That's a lot of words to say what I said, that there's a relatively too much emphasis in these rich people's lives upon these uncertain riches, in comparison to how they ought to take care of honoring God, and in particular, honoring God by what? Helping the church, which is His domain, that He has a special name on.

Because God doesn't need the riches, what's He going to do with the money? So that's the problem of the rich in this text. Then there's a similar warning in Revelation 3, 17, Because you say, I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have no nothing, and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. There he gets a little more specific here.

Paul, in his warnings here, isn't very specific beyond, don't be prideful, and don't put inordinate trust, because in a certain sense, you do have trust in money, you're hoping, that is, you're hoping and praying that the money you have is legitimate, it's not fake money, it's going to be useful for God's kingdom, for example. So you can use the word trust in that sense. In a good sense.

We do this often. We rely or trust upon this table to hold me up, for example, when I'm leaning over. Now, note, reminder, it is God who gives wealth.

So Paul gives this contrast I talked about a little bit before, and I'll unpack it here. Not to trust in uncertain riches, but rather, what, to trust in the living God, who is the source of all these riches for us, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Their own money and riches come from God Almighty, all our money and riches come from Him.

Your house, your car, and everything is from what? His providential hand. It's not as though you wake up one day, you prayed, and wow, there's a BMW in my front yard. That's not how it works.

God works through historical means, through cause and effect. The cause and effect of this world works and exists because God sustains it all. That's the doctrine of providence.

And we're called to use the means of providence to live as a believer, to have food, to get a job, take care of our family and the like. And God in His will deigns to bless or not bless, or that is, bless a little, bless a lot. His decision, of course, is sovereign will.

He gives more gifts here and less gifts there. It's all of His and all of His grace. He guides and directs all things for your good, not just spiritual but material, as we see here.

The bodily things of this world. It's a robust doctrine, in other words, a robust doctrine, a deep teaching of God's sovereignty and providence is actually the source of humility and cuts at the root of pride. How can you be haughty when you realize your riches are uncertain? Today, the market goes up, market goes down.

Who knows what's going to happen? People are crazy in America. God gives the increase. God gives the wealth.

You must rely upon Him. It leads to realization that all prosperity is from Him. Now, what Paul doesn't do here, if we notice in his exhortation to the rich, more negative, don't do this, don't do that.

He doesn't say, one, stop being rich. There's something wrong with you. Why are you rich? Godly people are poor.

You have that rhetoric at times. I've seen it in evangelical circles. You certainly have a whole institution of that in the Roman Catholic Church.

Let's use them as an example because they're such a large institution. We know a lot about them relatively speaking. They have the monks and all that.

They're supposed to have this vow of poverty and therefore supposed to reflect what? They're more godly than you are. That's what it's based upon, brothers and sisters. That's what it is.

You don't realize that. They're saying they're more godly. That's built into their system.

They're being more obedient. They're trying to get closer to God. The things in this world are too distracting for them, too beneath them.

Paul doesn't do that here. Isn't that interesting? In fact, he just continues on and says, well, God has given us richly all things. For what end? Well, we know to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

That's true. But he says here, particularly, to enjoy. It's okay to enjoy the things God has given you.

You're not somehow a weak Christian because of it. Now, you may enjoy it too much. I grant that.

Then there's a problem there. But in all things moderation, right? It's okay to enjoy some dessert once in a while, perhaps. Or to go out on vacation.

Or to leave the town for the week. Or to go somewhere nice. Or whatever the case is.

Go out for a nice, pleasant walk. You enjoy the fresh air and the mountain scenery. Because God gave it to you.

He's saying enjoy it. He gave you these riches. Enjoy it.

He also doesn't say what? Give it all away. You guys have this problem. You're haughty.

Let me tell you. Because you're haughty, I'm going to teach you a lesson. Give it all away.

Now, who do you tell that to in the New Testament? Who did Jesus tell to give it all away? The rich, young ruler. Remember I gave you that example? And I have seen pastors say, well look, this is true godliness. Give it all away.

What you learn, however, is that unless God literally gives you the command to give it all away, that's not what you're commanded to do. He was literally told to do that. Explicit command.

To him. Given his circumstances. Because he was obviously prideful.

For my youth I have obeyed the law of God. Really? Have you? Well, I'm here as the God man. I'm going to test you.

We don't have that kind of situation. Although the lesson is still important there to be taught. And here we see on the flip side that he just simply doesn't do that.

He says enjoy your riches. Don't be haughty. Trust in God.

And then of course the positive on the other hand is use the riches for one another. And of course if you give it all away, how can you help anybody when now you're poor? Because you gave it all away. Let them follow it all.

No. So they're supposed to rather redirect and include in their goals while they're rich, presumably one of the goals is keep getting more money, but use that money for what? The church of God. Take care of those in need.

Be willing and able, he says in verse 19, to give of what you have. So that leads us to the second point. Rich Christians should be rich in good works.

Rich Christians Should be Rich in Good Works

And of course it should be all Christians. Verses 18 and 19. Let them, the wealthy, do good that they be rich in good works.

So Paul's playing a word game there. A clever way of speaking to get their attention. Ready to give, willing to share.

Rich in good works. Storing up for themselves, in fact. A good foundation to come, we read.

And the idea there of course of storing up is you would typically store up your wealth and your riches for a rainy day. He's saying, okay, now store up good works right now for the future when Christ returns. And he judges every man.

Store up good works for the future when he comes to judge the quick and the dead. Not that your good works warrant heaven, that's not what he's saying, but they of course are blessed by God and rewarded by him when done by faith. Now he says two things here in verse 18.

That in doing the good works they ought to, one, be ready to give and two, willing to share. Ready to give, that is their riches or resources are readily available, as needed. Not out of reach and therefore useless for an emergency, for example.

Willing to share, that is, again Paul goes for the heart here. Their motivation should be for love for one another. Because one can certainly give of money even liberally to those in need that have these big foundations and whatnot, but do it with a reluctant heart.

For the Lord God tells us he loves a cheerful giver. Now the usefulness here I want to point out of the works of the rich. He says let them do good that they be rich in good works.

What kind of works and what can the rich do? Gifts of course to give a broader idea here, gifts are for God's church. Romans 12:4 For as we have many members in one body but all members do not have the same function, abilities or gifts. Verse 6 Having then gifts different according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them.

And Paul continues on there and says if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith. He who teaches in teaching, and he continues, he that rules with diligence, and he that shows mercy with cheerfulness. So we have these different abilities and opportunities that God has given us and he says use them for the body of Christ, these gifts.

And we may be tempted as a note here, to think that gifts for the church are gifts only for the church. But I think that's not the case often. That is to say if you have, as he says here, he who teaches or he that rules, you have the gift of ruling, the gift of teaching, you're going to probably exercise it outside the church anyways.

Because it's not a gift that just kind of cuts itself off. I leave the church and I'm not thinking about teaching other people anymore. No, I still like to teach.

I taught critical thinking for homeschoolers for a while. Because I'm a teacher. Not just on Sunday.

And ruling, that's why typically ruling elders you think of historically, they have some influence in society or they're somewhat successful and the like because they've already exercised what? Before the church they see oh they can already rule and they've already shown they can do X, Y, Z. So you do it outside the church is what I'm saying. But now in the case of riches, they're making lots of money outside the church. Move it from the church.

Turn around and redirect some of these resources that you have for God's people. They are called to be rich and good works. It's not limited to just simply of course paying the bill.

Wealth is one obvious example of rich good works that the rich can do. Use their money. Not always direct funds.

They can do investments and the like. We had that in our presbytery. A lady at one of the churches I don't remember the name of the church now.

I think the church folded and she had like a \$60,000 investment or whatever it's called. A will for the presbytery to dip into and use. That's what she did.

It was wonderful. Obadiah fund I think it was called for a while. That's the obvious thing.

Okay rich people, fork up the money. I like to point out other things that rich people can do in good works. They have experience and contacts presumably.

Many rich people I know I'm moving from middle class to rich rich. When I think of rich rich I think of people typically shown they've had good experience. They know how to invest.

They know how to pull back. They know what to buy etc. They know how things work and do and therefore they often have a lot of contacts or perhaps good advice and experience.

They can help direct and deal with matters in the church thereby. Doesn't have to be money. Time and effort of course.

Even hands on effort of good works. Paul doesn't limit it here. And of course we can often do that in middle class.

You may not have a lot of money. You've got to save up something for retirement. You've got to save up something for a rainy day.

You've got to save up something for your kids. There's a lot of things that adds up there money wise. But you may have time.

You may have opportunity. You may have experience that is needful in the church. And so these are the kind of good works.

And broadly speaking over the categories of wealth, experience, contacts, time and effort. But good works for in particular family and friends. And so here I'm obviously making a distinction between the church proper what you can do for the church as the church, as a group, a collection or individual Christians in your family, in your friends group.

But of course not only them. And when he says good works, I don't believe he's saying only the church. But of course do good to all men, especially the household of faith, Galatians 6.10. It's a good reminder for those who perhaps miserly that of course family comes first in time and money in many ways.

But family shouldn't only be the thing in their life. There's more to life than one's family. That we can benefit, especially for rich other people.

Our society and our neighborhood for example. So not just friends and family that good works are for. The good works are for society, our neighborhood, our city or state, clubs, other health ministries and food banks for example.

These are natural and good and are done by even unbelievers. But of course again you should make some room for the church of God. Do good to all men, especially the household of faith.

And that leads us to the church to whom these good works should be exercised towards. We have some examples in the New Testament. Matthew 27.57 where we have a burial.

What's at the end of Matthew? You know who the burial is for. It's for Jesus. Now when evening had come, there was a what? A rich man from Arimathea named Joseph who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus.

So the rich were involved. Gave of the land and gave of their money because they cared. The building in the upper room in Acts 1 and 2 carried 120 people.

Let me tell you, that wasn't a poor man's house. It was a rich man. The rich were redirected and did to give not just of money, of time and even resources to the church of God.

Financial support today is often the most direct and flexible, of course. I talked about that already. Contacts and the like for the church and the poor and needy.

And many times, these things are done behind closed doors. Right? Don't run around bragging and telling other people, look, I've helped this guy, did this. No.

Gave them money? No. And when you give, he doesn't mention this here, we see this elsewhere at times. When you give, you've got to realize you may not get it back.

They may not pay you back. So adjust your mind accordingly. Now I know in some cases they ought to, especially if it's a person who's not especially destitute but needs a little quick fix, for example.

They ought to pay you back for a little bit or whatever. They pay you back, they don't have to pay you back for interest. The Old Testament's interesting about that, isn't it? Interest amongst brethren? No.

A hundred bucks? That's fine. You pay me back? Okay. A hundred bucks is fine.

No interest. I don't need interest. I'm not a bank.

What the heck? I love you, brother. In fact, if you don't want to pay me back, that's fine. Now, some general advice about good works, being rich in good works, keep an eye out for opportunities of good works.

And that's why prayer time's helpful, and we send out prayer requests at times as well throughout the week, not just to keep you busy to read something, but that perhaps somebody out there can do something or be helpful in one way or the other. Be creative. There's another way.

Think of different things that can be done. And a reminder here, don't beat yourself up. Christ our Lord knows your limitations.

Some are too busy to be able to do hands-on work. Others may have a hard time finding anybody to help. Believe it or not, it's interesting that way.

That can arise at times. Lastly, when he says, be rich in good works, I don't believe Paul means haphazardly. Just happens to come across here, and these people need help, I'm just going to help them.

You've got to plan it. It has to have some forethought involved. Set aside in your budget money to be of help and those in need.

Now, I'm not saying it's wrong to do the other one in the sense that you don't have much of a budget, but you have an extra ten bucks and there you go. I'm not saying you have to be exactly precise like some professional businessman or something, but put some thought into it. Make some effort.

I mean, school and home requires a schedule, if only because you've got to coordinate different people and different events so that there's not a crash between kid's soccer and mom's dental appointment. And the same with your money. And it's a little harder because we don't have cash.

Everything's at a bank. It's all digital. You don't see it often.

And God is a God of order. Unified decisions, of course, can break the plan, and that's fine. Brothers and sisters in Christ our Lord, we are surrounded by and have a lot of prosperity.

To one degree or another, I know. And do not let it consume you. Do not be haughty and prideful and think, look at me, look how smart I am.

And don't trust in the riches because they can all disappear like your house from a fire, from a lightning storm, from hail. But rather, be rich in good works, whatever that may be in your life, for the saints of God and for God's glory. Amen, let us pray.

And Lord, we're thankful and grateful, God, for what you've done in our church. We've done a lot of good works, I've seen. May we persevere there, and even if people don't seem to be grateful, Lord, because our hearts are full of love, I pray, and ever abounding in grace and the power of the Holy Spirit.

We ask this in the blood of Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Amen.