

# OpenTheo

## Repudiating Greed - Part 1

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### **The Bible for Today with John Stott - Premier**

John Stott explains what the apostle Paul meant about slaves and masters in the context of his day. John also shows us how to identify false teachers and begins to set out the basis of how we should handle our money as Christians.

### **Transcript**

[Music] There is birth materialism which is a preoccupation with material things, and on the other hand there's criticism which is a repudiation of material things, both of them are incompatible with Christian faith. It's the third option that is neither materialism nor asceticism. And Paul answers here, yes there is.

Its name is contentment.

[Music] Welcome to the Bible for today with John Stott. Whilst John Stott impacted the church across the world, his home church was always all souls, laying in place on the heart of London's west end.

And it's from 600 sermons he preached there that were marking his centenary with some of his most powerful messages.

[Music] There are various topics that can cause us uneasies as Christians. Slavery for teachers and money are three that John Stott will address today.

All of them appear in the first letter that Paul wrote to young Timothy. So you'll find it helpful to have your Bible open to 1 Timothy chapter 6. Become to the end tonight of a series of studies in the first letter to Timothy, and I would like to ask you to look at once at the text. It really is extraordinary how modern and contemporary this old book, The Bible, continues to be.

I don't need to remind you that it was completed nearly two millennia ago, but here we are Sunday after Sunday, finding it worth our while to study this ancient book. And as we study it, we discover as the church in every generation has discovered how relevant it is

to our situation. Now today's passage alludes to three areas.

I'm not going to read it all because it is a little bit long, but it's 1 Timothy chapter 6 verses 1 to 10. And you'll notice it in the first two verses Paul gives instruction to slaves as to how they are to regard and treat their masters. First Timothy chapter 6 verses 1 to 10.

Secondly in verses 3 to 5, he gives instruction regarding false teachers, and in particular how to identify them. And thirdly he gives instruction to covetous people, to repudiate greed, and to learn that contentment is better than covetousness. Now here are three areas of work, our beliefs or our belief system, and how to construct it, and then our money, which are three very important areas of human life today, and on which the apostle gives instruction.

The principles can be applied to us just as relevantly as they could be in Timothy's own day. Now I want to hurry fairly quickly over the first two, because the third is our main theme this evening. But we don't want to leave them out.

Firstly an instruction to slaves. Let all who are under the yoke of slavery regard their masters as worthy of all honor or all respect. Not only if they are unbelievers, but even more so if they are believers, and beloved and therefore brothers in Christ.

Now if we thought about it at all I feel confident that all of this are perplexed as to why Jesus and his apostles did not call for the abolition of the institution of slavery. Because slavery that is to say the owning, the selling, the buying of human beings as if they were furniture or cattle is entirely incompatible with the nature of human beings as persons made in the image of God. Well we can only guess that slavery at that time was so integral to the culture, the social culture of the Roman Empire, that to abolish it at one-thurl swoop would have been to cause the social structure of the empire to crumble.

And that it really wasn't possible to do all in one. Meanwhile what the New Testament does is to lay down principles that undermine the institution of slavery and which led inexorably to its abolition or their many of us devoutly wish that it had taken place centuries before. Well while the institution lasted, slaves were to respect their masters even if they were non-Christians, less the name of God and the reputation of the apostolic teaching should come into disrepute.

And especially if as to if the slave master was a Christian then the slaves were not to be disrespectful to them on the ground that they were now brothers but to serve them even better. And in this situation of brotherhood there could of course be no longer ownership between two people. The very concept of the brotherhood of the slave master and the slave completely disintegrated in theory, the very notion and institution of slavery.

Brothers do not own one another. But nevertheless while they remain brothers they were

to give respectful service to their masters. Well just in passing that is very relevant to us in our work today.

We need to treat our employer with respect. And if our employer happens to be a Christian employer, a Christian boss then that far from giving us the opportunity to take liberties we should serve even better and harder because our employer is a beloved brother in the family or sister in the family of God. And instruction to slaves.

Now secondly there is an instruction about false teachers in verses three to five. If you've been coming these last few weeks you know how often the apostles referred to heresy or to forth teaching of various kinds in different chapters of this letter. Now the question to which he addresses himself here is how do you identify teaching that is false as opposed to true.

Well to ever simplify the situation Paul suggests that we should ask ourselves two questions. One about the origin of the teaching where does it come from. And the second about the effects of the teaching what result does it have in people's lives.

With regard to its origin he says that false teaching deviates from the teaching of Christ. Paul quite clearly assumes that there is such a thing as a norm of truth. There is such a thing as a doctrinal and ethical standard and that it is a declension from that norm or standard that renders teaching heretical or false.

Just glance at the end of verse two and the beginning of verse three. He says to Timothy not teach and urge literally these things. And if anybody teaches other things things that are different from these things then he goes on with his instruction about false teaching.

So there are these things and there are other things. There is a standard and there is teaching that is a deviation from that standard. If we had time it would be very interesting to note that in this chapter Paul refers to this standard by five different names.

He calls it the teaching, the truth, the faith, the commandment, the deposit. He takes it for granted that there is this structure of teaching that has been revealed by God and it is a deviation from this that helps us to identify what is heretical. Now then in verse three he uses another very interesting phrase.

He refers to the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now what on earth is he referring to? What are these sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ? All may certainly this is not a reference to the four gospels because again all may certainly they hadn't been written and published by the time that the apostle is here writing to Timothy. Nor does it seem likely that he is referring to some collection of the sayings of Jesus because he only quotes one saying of Jesus in this particular letter.

So probably commentators are on the heard agreed that the sound words of our Lord

Jesus Christ are in fact the words of the apostles of Jesus Christ. And the Paul is convinced that his own teaching is an apostle and the teaching of his fellow apostles is none other than the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ through his apostles who are the spokesman and the representatives or the apostles as we call them of Christ. Certainly this interpretation is compatible with a number of other passages in the New Testament.

For example I don't ask you to look it up but you're taking notes you might want to note the text. In 2 Corinthians 13 verse 3 he says that since you deserve proof that Christ is speaking in me. There is Paul's claim that Christ is speaking through him but he says if you want proof of it and then he goes on in a way that doesn't to concern us at the moment.

Another one is in Galatians when he says to them that when I came to you you didn't reject me although I had a disfiguring illness but you received me as if I was Jesus Christ. And now he doesn't rebuke them he says they should have done. He was a spokesman of Christ.

He was an apostle of Christ and his words were the words of Christ. Now that's why he goes on to say in verse 3 here that anybody who disagrees with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ is both conceited, puffed up with conceit and he knows nothing. And the rather graphic phrase of the new English Bible is a pompous ignoramus.

So there is the first test of teaching whether it is true or not whether it agrees with the teaching of Jesus Christ through his apostles which is a deposit of reveal truth now of course to be found in the New Testament. But then there is a second thing about how to identify false teaching and that is not only whether it deviates from the teaching of Christ but whether it promotes controversy or godliness. It's interesting in verse 3 we find that sound teaching is according to godliness.

Godliness is god-centeredness. Does this teaching lead people into a life that is centered in worship upon God? Or instead of leading to godliness does it rather lead to controversy. You notice what he writes here in verse 4. He has a morbid craving for controversy disputes about words.

You notice that it isn't serious controversy he's talking about. There is a place for controversy in the Christian church. We are called to defend the faith which is very clear in this holy puzzle against heresy.

But there is serious controversy about fundamental Christian doctrine and ethics. It isn't what he calls here disputes about words. Trivial irrelevant matters.

That is what false teaching often leads to. Well there are the first two things something about slavery something about false teaching but now we come thirdly to an instruction to the covetous verses 6 to 10. The topic of money.

It's one of extreme importance and conscientious concern to every thought for Christian man or woman today. Not least because it's a continuing and even increasing economic inequality between the north around the north Atlantic the west as we sometimes call it and the south. The developing nations of the third world.

For example, do you know this according to the annual report of the World Bank the year before last. Nearly a thousand million people in the world are destitute lacking that is to say the basic necessities for survival. And a thousand million is of course just more than a fifth of the population of the world.

Now it's true as the World Bank report goes on progress has been made in the last decade or so through the help of the international community. Progress has been made to increase the per capita income levels in many countries and to raise educational and medical standards in a variety of ways. But in absolute terms the number of poor people in the world continues to increase.

Well let me give you one example clean safe water is one of the basic necessities for health and life today in the worst it's piped into our homes hot and cold and is available at the turn of a tap. We don't regard constant safe clean water as a luxury we regard it as a necessity but 50% of the population of the third world do not have it and 70% have no sanitation. 15 million children under five die in the developing world every year mainly through waterborne diseases.

But again the slums and shanty towns of Africa and Asia the favelas of Brazil the bariades of the other countries of Latin America in which human beings made in the image of God scavenge in rubbish dumps as I have seen them with my own eyes like dogs and do eat cartonisable sub-human existence the existence of these places is a standing rebuke and an utter disgrace to the rest of the human community. Now all of us know that the ultimate solution to this appalling poverty of so many people in the world requires macroeconomic expertise. There is no simple solution I know and we need to pray that God will raise up a whole new generation of economists who are wise and bold and resourceful in the proposals they make and that the nations of the world will accept for the solution of the problem.

But meanwhile what should be our attitude to money to material possessions in the light of this widespread poverty. Well Ephesus as Ian Bentley mentioned last Sunday night in his sermon Ephesus was an opulent city at the time that Paul was writing and Timothy was working in one of the churches of Ephesus. And on his second visit there you may remember Paul came into conflict with Demetrius the silversmith and a guild of silversmiths who are becoming rich through selling little statuettes of the local goddess Diana.

Now it seems that by now there were some wealthy people in the church as well as in the city and some of them were gripped with the spirit of covetousness and materialism.

Others seemed to have assimilated some of the teaching of the gnostics and they had gone to the opposite extreme from materialism into asceticism. They forbade marriage, they forbade the eating of certain foods and they denied the good gifts of a good creator.

So it seems that there were some members of the Ephesian church who were materialists and there were some who had gone to the opposite extreme and were ascetics. So what position should the Ephesian Christians take? What position should you and I take? There is both materialism which is a preoccupation with material things and on the other hand asceticism which is a repudiation of material things, both of them are incompatible with Christian faith. So is there a third option? Is there a third option that is neither materialism, no asceticism? And Paul answers here, yes there is.

Its name is contentment. Now I want to ask you to notice if you will that there are two paragraphs in this chapter that have to do with money. One of them is what we are looking at tonight.

Verse 9 he says those who desire to be rich. And the other one is the one that Ian Bentley was looking at last week beginning in verse 17, those who are rich in this world. I think it is very important to put those two paragraphs together and I hope you'll reflect on them yourself at some time.

There is advice here for those who are rich and there is advice here for those who are not rich but wish they were. That is the covetous. And Paul's teaching to both categories is very important and they need to be held in balance with one another.

I want to glance again at the passage those who are rich were 17. They are exposed to two dangers. The first is pride.

Tell those who are rich not to be arrogant. Rich people sometimes are arrogant. They boast of their new house and their new car and their new gadgets and their new computer.

And their despise or tend to despise people who don't have their wealth. Tell the rich people not to be arrogant. And tell them not to put their trust in uncertain riches.

It's very foolish to trust in riches. I'm not sure if you're interested in the phrase that Jesus also used in talking to the rich young ruler because riches are uncertain. Not only because of moth and rust to which Jesus referred in the Sermon on the Mount but because of inflation.

There are many people who go to bed rich and wake up poor because of the inflationary situation. So why put our trust in riches? We are called to put our trust not in a thing called money but in a person called God. And the rich may put their trust in uncertain riches instead of in the living God who gives us all things richly to enjoy.

That is a very important addition because it tells us that we mustn't replace materialism with their asceticism. God is a generous God. He gives us all things to enjoy.

He doesn't mean us to be negative in our asceticism denying the good gifts of the Creator. We are to enjoy the good gifts of creation. We are to enjoy our family life, marriage and the family, friendships, music, culture, butterflies, birds and many other good gifts of our Creator.

And yes, we are to enjoy food and clothing and possessions as well because they are given to us by good Creator. John Stott has much more to say about greed which you can hear next week when he will conclude his very practical message. It's based on the New Testament letter of 1 Timothy chapter 6. And you can discover what John Stott has to say on all of 1 Timothy by reading his commentary, the message of 1 Timothy.

It's part of the Bible Speaks Today commentary series. Find out more by visiting our website [premierchristianradio.com/JohnStott](http://premierchristianradio.com/JohnStott). The legacy of John Stott lives on and is growing, touching every level of society across the world. Today Christian leaders throughout the majority world are being equipped to provide pastor training and resources in their own countries thanks to the vision of John Stott who donated all his book royalties to support this ministry through Langham Partnership.

To find out about this and other ministries John Stott founded, go to [premier.org.uk/JohnStott](http://premier.org.uk/JohnStott). Join us at the same time next week for more from The Bible for Today with John Stott.

[Music]

(buzzing)