

Paul continues needed instruction for the faithful on godly conduct in the House of God while here on earth. Not all of the saints are free men able to move about and change residence and employment at will. God is not silent about slaves. But living in the anti-slavery, human rights culture in the United States nowadays we might be surprised at His views on slavery. He acknowledges that believers may find themselves to be slaves, and more surprising, believers are found to be owner/masters as well. We little appreciate the privileges that accompany freedom we have in the United States today. Despite the successful efforts of men, including many believers, a century and a half ago to abolish slavery we can't find any authority from scripture to oppose it. Paul does not question the institution of slavery, or that there was a Christian master of a slave when he writes Philemon. He urges him to receive as a brother Onesimus, a runaway slave, converted through Paul while imprisoned. Paul advises believers to be content where they are, but to accept freedom if opportunity presents itself, 1Corinthians 7:21-23. He also commands masters to be fair, impartial and considerate as having to answer to their Master in heaven, Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:25-4:1 and here. In these same scriptures we learn that workers, slaves or simply employees, are to work as working for the Lord not men. Peter says the same and commends a believer who is maltreated or unjustly punished by his or her master and takes it without complaint, 1Peter 2:18-23. Here in his letter to Timothy Paul adds another dimension. He warns slaves, or employees, of a fellow believer against taking advantage of their master. If anything, we ought to the more readily serve a fellow believer faithfully, benefitting him. The instructions of scripture leave little room for a believer joining a labor union, much less picketing or striking. An unequal yoke with unbelievers is usually involved along with rejection of authorities which God has given over us. Employers need to take care to assure employees are regarded with goodwill and rewarded justly in a manner worthy of our master in heaven.

Now Paul strongly cites the authority of the risen, ascended Lord Jesus Christ in all that he has written Timothy. He is to teach and exhort all that is written here. We are too. These are wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and doctrine (teaching) which is according to godliness. Anyone who teaches otherwise is soundly condemned as being "proud, knowing nothing, but doting (harping) about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness," a strong rebuke indeed. (The phrase "from such withdraw thyself" [KJV] is not in the best manuscripts.) Are we to go along with such? Obviously not. Paul had dealt with some already, chapter 1:19-20. But we are given here instead the

positive attitude and path that keeps all in godly perspective. Not wealth, but godliness with contentment is our great gain. Contentment! How sweet the sound! Godliness! How pure and clean! Not covetousness (which is said elsewhere to be idolatry, Colossians 3:5). It is no coincidence the first of the Ten Commandments is "no other gods before Me" and the last is against covetousness. In Old Testament times God's blessings in the form of earthly prosperity was a signal of His approval of the faith of the person so blessed. Abraham and Job are examples. Men have perverted this idea today. Supposed Christians even preach a prosperity gospel in direct opposition to the scripture here before us. Gain isn't godliness. Does our earthly gain lead to thanksgiving and generosity or to cares and selfishness? God may grant us earthly blessings that become a test of our loyalty and dependence upon Him. Paul's words are blunt and to the point. Job said it first:

Job 1:21 *And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.*

It is indeed certain we can carry nothing out. The heathen tombs discovered centuries after burial are full of treasures and provisions for the afterlife, all still unused. While "we can't take it with us," we can lay up treasures in heaven. Send it on ahead so to speak, 5:18-19. The Lord said:

Matthew 6:19-34 *Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: 20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: 21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. . .*

Hebrews 13:5 *Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*

The problem is not money or wealth but the desire for it, whether one has it or not. Poor or rich, the "love of money" is a root of every evil. Money itself is not evil. Having money isn't evil. Spending money isn't evil. He doesn't say all evil is caused by money. He says that the LOVE of money can be a root of every evil possible. Coveting money for what it can buy or as a prideful symbol of one's success leads toward evil behavior either in order to get it (or get more) to hang on to it. If "independently wealthy" beware of becoming independent of God. Being able to do things otherwise beyond the reach of an ordinary income can feed generosity or lead to attempts to run other's lives or to fund sinful endeavors. Gambling and sweepstakes are part of the "something for nothing" lust of the human heart in all of mankind. Coveting after money and wealth Paul says rightly, leads one astray from the faith, away from dependence on the One who loves us and died to save us. God gives us eternal life at no cost to us, at infinite cost to Himself. Infinite gain! Take it! Live it. Give as He gave.

By Ron Canner, May 3, 2006.