

The Books of 1 and 2 Timothy, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 7: Godliness with Contentment

1 Timothy 6:1-21

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This closing chapter brings First Timothy to its great practical and doctrinal climax: the contrast between true godliness and the love of money. Paul exposes false teachers who treat religion as a path to profit (v. 5) and ordinary hearts that crave wealth until it draws them away from the faith (vv. 9-10). Over against this he sets the quiet treasure of "godliness with contentment" (v. 6). This lesson aims to give your class a clear conviction that the gospel is not a means to financial gain, that the love of money is a genuine spiritual danger, and that real riches are found in a contented heart fixed on God.

The doctrinal heart of the lesson is twofold. First, Paul charges us to "guard the deposit" (v. 20), the apostolic faith handed down to the church, against "what is falsely called knowledge." The gospel is a treasure entrusted to us to protect, not to revise. Second, Paul lifts our eyes to the glory and sovereignty of God, "who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light" (v. 16), and to the certain appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ (v. 14). The Christian hope is set on Christ's return, not on any earthly scheme, and that hope reorders how we hold money, run the race, and guard the truth.

Finally, this lesson aims squarely at spiritual formation. Paul does not merely diagnose the love of money; he prescribes a whole way of life: flee, pursue, fight, take hold, guard, and give (vv. 11-12, 17-19). The believer is called to actively pursue righteousness and contentment, to fight the good fight, and to be rich in good works. Press your students to feel that the antidote to greed is not grim self-denial but a heart so satisfied in God and so eager to give that money loses its grip. Aim at hearts set free to be generous.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul confronts teachers who imagine "that godliness is a means of gain," and answers that "godliness with contentment is great gain" (vv. 5-6). What does this teach us about the difference between using religion for profit and the true gain that godliness brings?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Open with the false teachers Paul describes, those "imagining that godliness is a means of gain" (v. 5). They had it exactly backward. They saw religion as a tool for getting rich, a way to leverage the name of God for personal profit. Paul has no patience for it, listing it among the marks of a corrupt and conceited mind (vv. 4-5).

Then watch Paul turn the phrase on its head. “But godliness with contentment is great gain” (v. 6). He does not deny that godliness brings gain; he redefines what the gain is. The profit of godliness is not money but a contented heart, a soul at rest in God. That is a wealth no market crash can touch.

Draw out the contrast for the class. One person uses God to get things; the other has God and so needs few things. One is always grasping; the other is at peace. The false teacher’s religion leaves him hungry no matter how full his pockets; the godly, contented believer is rich while owning little.

Apply it to subtle modern forms. We may not preach for profit, but we can quietly treat faith as a means to comfort, success, or a trouble-free life, a transaction in which we expect God to pay out. Help the class see that true godliness seeks God Himself, and finds in Him the great gain of a contented heart.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The error of treating godliness as a means to financial or material gain (v. 5)
- True gain redefined as godliness joined with a contented heart (v. 6)
- Contentment in God as wealth no circumstance can take away
- The difference between using God for things and treasuring God Himself

Discussion Prompts

- How do people today subtly treat religion as a means to gain or success?
- What does Paul mean that godliness with contentment is “great gain”?
- Where might you be expecting God to pay out comfort rather than seeking God Himself?

Question 2

Student Question:

Paul reminds us, “we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world” (v. 7). How does remembering this truth reshape the way you hold your possessions, your money, and your plans?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Center on the simple, leveling truth of verse 7: “we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.” We arrive with empty hands and we leave with empty hands. Everything in between is on loan. Let the class sit with how clarifying that is.

Help students feel the freedom in it. If nothing we hold is ultimately ours to keep, then the frantic grip we keep on possessions and plans is misplaced. We are stewards, not owners. That truth can loosen anxiety about losing things and loosen the love of acquiring them.

Make it practical. Ask each person where they are holding too tightly, to a possession, a savings number, a plan for the future, a level of comfort. Then ask what it would look like to hold that same thing with open hands, as a steward grateful for the loan rather than an owner terrified of the loss.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The temporary, stewardship nature of all earthly possessions (v. 7)
- Freedom from anxious grasping in the light of eternity
- The believer as steward rather than owner of what God provides
- Open-handedness as the fruit of remembering we take nothing out

Discussion Prompts

- How does remembering you can take nothing out of this world change how you hold things?
- Where are you gripping a possession, plan, or comfort too tightly?
- What would it look like to hold that with open hands as a steward?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul writes that “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith” (v. 10). What does this teach us about the spiritual danger of money, and how it can pull a believer away from Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Handle the famous verse carefully: “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils” (v. 10). Note precisely what Paul says and does not say. He does not say money is evil, nor that it is the root of all evil. He says the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. The danger lies in the heart’s affection, not in the coins themselves.

Trace the path Paul describes. The desire to be rich plunges people “into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction” (v. 9). The craving is a trap, and verse 10 names its deadliest harm: “through this craving some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.” Loving money can cost a person their very faith.

Explain why money is so spiritually dangerous. It promises what only God can give: security, significance, freedom, peace. So it becomes a rival god, and Jesus said plainly that no one can serve both God and money (Matthew 6:24). The love of money does not merely distract; it competes for the throne of the heart.

Apply it soberly. Help the class see that this is not only a rich person’s temptation. The craving for more can grip anyone at any income. The cure is not poverty but a heart so anchored in God

that money is dethroned and put back in its place as a tool to be used, not a master to be served.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The love of money, not money itself, as a root of many evils (v. 10)
- Greed as a snare that can lead a believer to wander from the faith
- Money as a rival god competing for the heart's allegiance (Matthew 6:24)
- The danger present at every income level, not only among the wealthy
- The cure as a heart anchored in God, not the mere absence of money

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it so important that Paul says the love of money, not money itself, is the danger?
- How can the craving for more pull a person away from Christ?
- In what ways does money promise to give what only God can truly provide?

Question 4

Student Question:

Paul says, "if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content" (v. 8). What does true contentment look like in your life, and where do you most struggle to be content with what God has provided?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Focus on verse 8: "if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content." Paul sets the bar of contentment startlingly low, at the basic necessities of life. This is not a call to poverty but a recalibration of what we actually need versus what we have been trained to crave.

Help students examine their own contentment honestly. Contentment is not having everything; it is wanting what you have. Ask where the line of "enough" keeps moving for them, always just a little beyond their reach. That moving line is the enemy of peace.

Point to the source of real contentment. Paul learned the secret in Christ, content in plenty or in want (Philippians 4:11-13). Contentment is not a personality trait but a fruit of trusting God's provision and presence. Ask each person to name one area where they will choose gratitude for what God has given rather than discontent over what He has not.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Contentment grounded in God's provision of basic needs (v. 8)
- The difference between needs and culturally manufactured wants
- Contentment as a learned fruit of trusting God (Philippians 4:11-13)
- Gratitude as the practical posture of a content heart

Discussion Prompts

- Where does your line of “enough” keep moving just out of reach?
- What does it mean that contentment is wanting what you have rather than having what you want?
- What is one area where you could choose gratitude over discontent this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul charges Timothy to “flee these things,” and instead “pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness” and to “fight the good fight of the faith” (vv. 11-12). What does this teach us about the active, fighting nature of the Christian life?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Move to Paul’s vigorous commands in verses 11-12. He tells Timothy to “flee these things,” the love of money and its snares, and then to “pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.” The Christian life involves both a running from and a running toward; we flee sin and chase after godliness.

Highlight the fighting language. “Fight the good fight of the faith” (v. 12). The word pictures the strenuous effort of an athlete or soldier. Faith is not passive drifting; it is a contest that demands everything. Paul will use the same image of himself at the end of his life: “I have fought the good fight” (2 Timothy 4:7).

Walk briefly through the virtues to pursue. Righteousness and godliness shape how we live before God; faith and love shape how we trust and treat others; steadfastness and gentleness shape how we endure and how we handle people. These are not passive feelings but active pursuits, things we chase and practice.

Apply it to the class. Help them feel that the antidote to greed and drift is not merely avoiding sin but actively pursuing Christ and His character. A heart busy chasing godliness, love, and faith has little room left for the love of money. The best defense is a good pursuit.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Christian life as both fleeing sin and pursuing godliness (v. 11)
- The active, fighting nature of faith, not passive drifting (v. 12)
- The cluster of virtues to be actively pursued, not merely admired
- Pursuit of Christ’s character as the antidote to greed and drift (2 Timothy 4:7)

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that faith is a “good fight” to be fought, not a passive feeling?

- Which of the virtues Paul lists do you most need to actively pursue right now?
- How does chasing after godliness crowd out the love of money?

Question 6

Student Question:

Paul tells Timothy to “take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (v. 12). How does remembering your own confession of Christ strengthen you to keep fighting and holding on today?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Focus on verse 12, where Paul reminds Timothy of “the good confession” he made “in the presence of many witnesses.” This points back to Timothy’s own public confession of faith in Christ, likely at his baptism, when he openly declared Jesus as Lord before the church.

Help students recall their own confession. Most believers can remember the moment they confessed Christ and were baptized into Him, publicly aligning their lives with Jesus. Paul’s point is that remembering that confession steadies us in the present. We have already declared whose we are; now we live it out.

Make it strengthening. When the fight grows hard and the pull of the world grows strong, returning to that confession reanchors us. Ask each person to recall their own confession of Christ and to consider how remembering it can give them courage to keep holding on and fighting today.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The good confession of Christ as Lord, made publicly (v. 12)
- Confession and baptism as the believer’s public alignment with Christ
- Remembering our confession as a source of present steadfastness
- Living out today the allegiance we once openly declared

Discussion Prompts

- What do you remember about when you confessed Christ and were baptized into Him?
- How can remembering that confession strengthen you to keep fighting today?
- What does it mean to keep living out the allegiance you once publicly declared?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul charges Timothy before God “who gives life to all things” to keep the commandment “until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ” (vv. 13-14). What does this teach us about the Christian’s hope and the certain return of Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Center on Paul’s solemn charge in verses 13-14. He charges Timothy before “God, who gives life to all things, and Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession,” to keep the commandment “unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Everything is framed by the certain return of Christ.

Draw out the hope. The Christian lives leaning toward “the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This is the blessed hope of the church, that the same Jesus who came once will come again in glory. Paul piles up praise in verses 15-16: God will display this appearing “at the proper time,” the only Sovereign, King of kings and Lord of lords.

Clarify the nature of this hope against confusion. The Christian’s hope is set on Christ’s personal, visible return at the end, not on any earthly scheme of a future political kingdom. Christ already reigns now as King of kings (v. 15; Colossians 1:13), and we await His appearing, when He will raise the dead and bring final salvation. Our gaze is fixed on that day.

Apply it to daily living. The certainty of Christ’s appearing gives shape and seriousness to the present. We keep the commandment “unstained” because we will stand before Him. Hope for His return is not escapism; it is the fuel for faithful, watchful, holy living right now.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The certain, personal appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ as the Christian’s hope (v. 14)
- Christ already reigning now as King of kings and Lord of lords (v. 15; Colossians 1:13)
- The blessed hope set on Christ’s return, not on an earthly political scheme
- God as the only Sovereign who will bring the appearing at the proper time (vv. 15-16)
- The return of Christ as motivation for present, faithful, holy living

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean to live leaning toward “the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ”?
- How does the certainty of Christ’s return shape the way you live today?
- Why does it matter that Christ reigns as King now, not only in some future age?

Question 8

Student Question:

Paul commands the rich “not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches,” but to be “rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share” (vv. 17-18). Whatever your income, where is God inviting you to hold your resources more loosely and to give more freely?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Turn to Paul's instructions to the rich in verses 17-18. He does not tell them to give everything away, but he does give three warnings and a calling. Do not "be haughty," do not "set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches," but set hope on God, and "be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share."

Help every student apply this, regardless of income. By global and historical standards, most of us are among the rich Paul addresses. The temptations are universal: pride in what we have, and a quiet trust in money rather than God for our security. Both must be confronted.

Point to the calling. The antidote to the dangers of wealth is generosity. To be "rich in good works" and "ready to share" is how we hold money without being held by it. Ask each person where God is inviting them to hold their resources more loosely and to give more freely, naming one concrete act of generosity this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The dangers of wealth: pride and misplaced hope in riches (v. 17)
- Hope set on God rather than on the uncertainty of riches
- Generosity and good works as the calling of those who have (v. 18)
- Giving as the way to hold money without being mastered by it

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you tempted to set your security on money rather than on God?
- What does it mean to be "rich in good works" and "ready to share"?
- Where is God inviting you to hold your resources more loosely this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul ends by charging Timothy, "O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge" (v. 20), set against the glory of God "who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light" (v. 16). What is the deposit we are to guard, what does it mean to guard it against false knowledge, and how does the glory and sovereignty of God anchor this charge?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal high point of the lesson, and of the whole letter, where two great themes converge: guarding the deposit and the glory of God. Paul's final, urgent charge is, "O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge, for by professing it some have swerved from the faith" (vv. 20-21). The deposit is the apostolic gospel, the body of truth entrusted to the church.

Explain what the deposit is and what guarding it means. The gospel is not Timothy's to invent or revise; it is a treasure handed to him to protect and pass on intact (compare 2 Timothy 1:13-14). To guard it is to hold firmly to the apostolic teaching, now preserved for us in the complete New Testament, and to refuse to add to it or subtract from it. The faith was "once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

Identify the threat: "what is falsely called knowledge." There were teachers boasting of a deeper, secret wisdom beyond the simple gospel, and Paul calls it counterfeit knowledge that leads people to swerve from the faith. The same danger persists wherever someone claims a new revelation, a deeper insight, or a wisdom that moves beyond Scripture. We test every such claim by the apostolic deposit and hold fast to what was delivered.

Now connect this to the glory of God Paul has just exalted in verses 15-16. The God we serve is "the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see." This towering vision of God's majesty is the anchor of the charge. We guard the deposit because it is the truth about this glorious, sovereign, eternal God, and we have no authority to tamper with His revelation.

Help the class marvel and resolve. The same God who alone has immortality has entrusted His gospel to ordinary people like us, and asks us to keep it faithfully until Christ appears. Guarding the deposit is not narrow stubbornness; it is reverent loyalty to a glorious God and His saving truth. Send your class out resolved to hold fast the gospel, to test every new teaching against Scripture, and to give God the honor and eternal dominion that are His (v. 16).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The deposit as the apostolic gospel entrusted to the church to guard, not revise (v. 20; 2 Timothy 1:13-14)
- The faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3)
- Against new revelation or secret "knowledge" beyond Scripture (v. 20)
- The complete New Testament as the standard for testing all teaching
- The glory and sovereignty of God as the anchor of faithful guarding (vv. 15-16)
- God alone possessing immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light
- Reverent loyalty to God's truth as the heart of guarding the deposit

Discussion Prompts

- What is the "deposit" we are charged to guard, and how do we guard it today?
- How should the completed New Testament shape our response to claims of new or deeper knowledge?
- How does the glory and sovereignty of God in verses 15-16 give weight to this charge?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole chapter, and the whole letter. Paul has called us to godliness with contentment, the good fight of faith, and the guarding of the gospel. Name one specific way Jesus is using this passage to form you, and one concrete step you will take because of it.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone draws together the chapter and the whole letter. Paul has set godliness with contentment against the love of money (vv. 6-10), called Timothy to flee, pursue, and fight (vv. 11-12), fixed our hope on Christ's appearing (vv. 13-16), summoned the rich to generosity (vv. 17-19), and charged us to guard the gospel (vv. 20-21). The thread is a life set free from money's grip and fixed on God.

Invite each person to look back across First Timothy and name what God has stirred. Perhaps it is a craving to surrender, a contentment to cultivate, a generosity to begin, a fight to take up again, or a renewed resolve to guard and live the gospel. The aim is something specific, not a vague nod toward growth.

Press for one concrete step. Maybe it is a deliberate act of giving, a practice of gratitude, a confession of greed, or a recommitment to the good fight. Help your class turn the truth of this chapter, and this whole letter, into a single act of obedience this week, trusting that Christ is forming them through His word until He appears.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- A life freed from the love of money and content in God
- The good fight of faith carried on to the end
- The gospel guarded and lived until Christ appears
- Spiritual formation as the goal of all sound teaching

Discussion Prompts

- What is the single most important thing God has shown you in this chapter or this letter?
- What is one concrete step you will take this week because of it?
- How can this class help one another fight the good fight and guard the faith?