

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL STUDY IN THE FIRST BOOK OF TIMOTHY – PART SEVEN – NOTES ON CHAPTER SIX AND A FINAL ASSIGNMENT

In the final chapter of this powerful explanation of Christian leadership Paul completes his review of the needy groups he wants Timothy to concentrate on. His choice of these two categories of struggling people is surprising.

He talks first about the poorest of the poor, the slaves who are believed to have made up more than half the population of the Roman Empire in those days. It seems as if they came to Christ in large numbers. 'Redemption' means to set a slave free by paying the price for him or her. Jesus had done just that for the slaves of sin by His sacrifice on the cross. Surely now they were free to walk away from earthly slavery? Paul's answer must have disappointed those waiting for an excuse for rebellion. He urges slaves in Christ to be better slaves. Because their real Master is in heaven, they will want to serve their earthly masters at all times, not only when they are being watched by them. Onesimus was to be a lovely example of this principle in action.(Philemon) Instead of despising as cruel bullies who exploit them, they are to be beautiful examples of Christ who came to earth to serve, not to control.(Lk.22:27; Jn.13:12-17) But what about slaves with Christian masters who are now their brothers in Christ? Their desire to serve them should be even greater. The same should be true for poorly paid workers today whom poverty traps almost as surely as chains on a slave. Helping them to understand and apply the gospel will achieve far more than political change.(6:1,2)

As always Paul points out that the real hindrance to transformation is in wrong teaching and therefore the only answer to social inequality is in proclaiming the truth. False doctrine takes many forms but all of it begins with conceit, believing we know better than God. This attitude may be expressed in all kinds of useless side-tracks which results in competing leaders who are in constant conflict, which in turn does huge damage to our witness in society. Paul describes these jealous preachers as 'depraved and deprived'! Behind this unhappy rivalry so often is money.

This introduces us to the second needy group, the rich. Which do we want to be – rich in money or rich in Christ? If we listen to the gospel and trust Christ, His godliness will show in us and we will be rich in contentment.(Phil.4:11) We arrived in this world at birth with nothing. When we die we can take nothing with us. What are we to value in between? All that really matters is the necessities of daily life. Sadly the rich in material terms have been misled into believing that things matter. Their love for money and what it can buy does enormous damage both to the rich and to those around them who suffer as a consequence of their greed. They will have to choose,(Matt.6:19-24) between money and Jesus.(6:3-10)

To end his letter Paul now gives Timothy seven instructions which sum up the action we need to take when God calls us to minister His word to others:

1. Flee from these things, you man of God... In our modern western world, materialism is so pervasive that it takes a conscious decision to run, not just dawdle away from it. It is an addiction which does not easily let us go.
2. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness... It is not enough just to run away from materialism. We need somewhere else to run to. We need Jesus who shows us what is truly right and produces godliness in us as we come to Him by faith. This godliness is expressed as love, the love of God which gives unconditionally, and perseveres in good times and tough times. Surprisingly it is gentleness, not domination which wins people to Jesus.
3. Fight the good fight of faith... We are in an all-out war which we are to fight – gently! People are persuaded as they see faith, not aggression, in action. We will be protected by our Commander and have been well armed with just one weapon, the sword of the Spirit, the word of God.(Eph.6:10-17)
4. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called... While the Bible is our one weapon, what we are grasping is not just words in a book but the very life of Christ, the central topic of the whole scripture.(I Jn.5:11,12)
5. Keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ... Paul has earlier talked of the standard for overseers that they are to be ‘above reproach’.(I Tim.3:2) This is impossible for us but wonderfully possible for the Holy Spirit who lives in us. Never settle for anything less, now and until the end of time.
6. Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches... There is hope for the rich as well as the slaves. If they will learn to be rich in Christ they can make a difference to the lives of those who are desperately poor. As they learn to let go of things and take hold of the life of Jesus, though their bank balances on earth may shrink, their riches in heaven will grow.
7. Guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter... Our spiritual riches need to be guarded from the false teacher who will rob us if we let him.

How do we fulfil all these instructions? Only by enjoying all His grace, His totally undeserved gift!

#### FINAL ASSIGNMENT ON FIRST TIMOTHY

How is Christian leadership different from secular leadership? What is its purpose? What is its absolute priority? Who can be a Christian leader? What will be the result of good leadership? How can leadership be improved? What happens to the Christian church when leadership fails?