

Instructions To Rich Christians

Our study is from 1 Timothy 6:17-19. It is about wealthy believers and their relationship to their riches. But before we plunge into the passage, we need to review a few truths about riches or wealth.

1 Samuel 2:7 is an important passage for us because some people think riches are evil. But the verse clearly reveals that wealth is not inherently evil because we are told that God gives riches to some individuals and others He makes poor. Now if wealth was evil, then God would not be giving it to people. Here is the verse,

The LORD makes poor and rich;
He brings low,
He also exalts.
He raises the
poor from the
dust,
1 Samuel 2:7
(NASB)

So, God gives wealth to both unbelievers and believers. He does this to accomplish His will and purposes. The truth

is that wealth is a greater danger to some individuals than it is to others. God knows that. If God has given us wealth, then we should thank Him. We must remember that we are to use the riches that He has given to us as a tool for His glory. 1 Corinthians 10:31 tells us to do all for the glory of God.

PROBLEMS WITH HAVING RICHES. So, riches are neither good or evil; but riches can motivate us to have wrong attitudes and behavior. The first and greatest danger with riches is that they can motivate a person to be content with the things of this world and therefore, not seek God. An important exam-

ple of the negative influence of riches is the rich, young ruler who came to Jesus and wanted to know how to gain eternal life (Matthew 19:16-29; Mark 10:17-27; Luke 18:18-27). We are told that after Jesus had talked with this very wealthy young ruler, Jesus told the disciples in Luke 18:24-25 that it is hard for the wealthy to enter the kingdom of God. Here is what Jesus said,

How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God! For 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. Luke 18:24-25 (NASB)



Verse 26 says,

They who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" Luke 18:26 (NASB)

Then Jesus replied with,

The things that are impossible with people are possible with

God. Luke 18:27 (NASB)

This can be a shocking statement for anyone who is wealthy. This seems to suggest that being rich is dangerous. Does this mean the wealthy cannot be saved? But that cannot be true because Luke 19:1-10 tells us that a very wealthy man named Zaccheus was saved. Just read Luke 19:1-10. Jesus was not saying that the wealthy cannot be saved. He was simply saying that God must draw the wealthy to Himself so that they can be saved. God the Father must have chosen them before the

foundation of the world to be saved (Acts 13:48; Ephesians 1:3-5; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:1-7; 2 Peter 1:1). Then the Father must effectually draw them (John 6:65,44, 37) and give them the faith to believe (Ephesians 2:8-9).

The reason that it is impossible for the rich to be saved is that they are not capable of seeking the true God on their own. The issue is not their riches. They also become content with the riches God has given to them. This same problem infested the church in Laodicea in Revelation 3:16b-17. We are told . . .

I will spit you out of My mouth. Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked . . . Revelation 3:16b-17 (NASB)

Wealth deceives people into thinking that wealth is all they need. So, people with wealth do not realize they are spiritually poor and going to hell. But the poor and middle class are usually not content and know that they have great needs. The point is there is a great spiritual benefit to not being wealthy. Being rich can be dangerous. Proverbs 11:28 warns,

**He who trusts in his riches will fall,
But the righteous will flourish like the green leaf.
Proverbs 11:28 (NASB)**

Now what about rich Christians? Can they be deceived too? The answer is yes! Jesus warned us in Matthew 6:24 that we can be deceived into thinking we can serve two masters. He said,

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. Matthew 6:24 (NASB)

This warning applies to all believers, especially wealthy believers. Even rich believers can serve their wealth. While wealth is neither good or evil, we can serve it and not God.

INSTRUCTIONS TO RICH CHRISTIANS. Therefore in 1 Timothy 6, the Holy Spirit reminds us that we need to be content with what God has given to us. We are commanded to

not love money. We discovered that in the study of 1 Timothy 6:6-10. Verse 10a said the love of money can motivate many different sins. That study was addressed to every believer.

But our study is addressed to rich believers. It is found in 1 Timothy 6:17-19. The rich Christians in this world are given three principles in these three verses. Verse 17 gives us the first two principles. Here is the verse,

Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. 1 Timothy 6:17 (NASB)

This is an interesting verse. The concept of riches appears three times. First, it refers to the "rich in this present world." Then it refers to the "uncertainty of riches." Finally, we are urged to trust God who "richly supplies us" with all things to enjoy. Riches is a major theme in this verse and the next two verses. So, these verses are addressed to believers who are rich in this present world. They are told to avoid three things and to do one thing.

Principle 1 — Do Not Be Conceited. The first principle is that rich believers are not to be conceited. The Greek word for conceited is a compound word. The two words mean "high" and "to think." That is, the Greek word means "to think high" of oneself in comparison to other people. This can be a much greater problem for some rich people than for those who have less. Some rich people think they have arrived and are better than other people. Some rich believers think they are favored by God.

The book of Daniel tells us about one individual who was extremely proud. His name was King Nebuchadnezzar. He is an example of a rich person who was proud. In Daniel 4 we are told that the prophet Daniel had warned the king to be humble and not sin by thinking that he had built the city of Babylon all by himself. But the king did not follow the warning and we read this in Daniel 4:29-30.

Twelve months later he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon. The king reflected and said, 'Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by

the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?’ Daniel 4:29-30 (NASB)

King Nebuchadnezzar was thinking highly of himself. He believed he had accomplished everything. But since he had ignored God’s warning, the next verses tell us that he would be punished.

While the word was in the king’s mouth, a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you, and you will be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place will be with the beasts of the field. You will be given grass to eat like cattle, and seven periods of time will pass over you until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whom-ever He wishes.’ Immediately the word concerning Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled; and he was driven away from mankind and began eating grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair had grown like eagles’ feathers and his nails like birds’ claws. Daniel 4:31-33 (NASB)

There is historical evidence that suggests the king did behave as an animal for seven years. God made him insane for a while! Verses 34-35 say that seven years later King Nebuchadnezzar’s sanity was restored. Here are King Nebuchadnezzar’s own words,

But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Highest and praised and honored Him who lives forever;

For His dominion is an everlasting dominion,
And His kingdom endures from generation to generation.
All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,
But He does according to His will in the host of heaven
And among the inhabitants of earth;
And no one can ward off His hand
Or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’”

Daniel 4:28-33 (NASB)

The king had learned a valuable lesson. He had sinned when he did not recognize that God had enabled him to build the

Babylonian empire. It is God who gives us everything that we possess. We must not be conceited. We must not think highly of ourselves. King Nebuchadnezzar is the illustration, but James 4:6-7 gives us the principle that believers are not to be proud. It says,

GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE. Submit therefore to God. James 4:6-7 (NASB)

Earlier in James 2:1, believers are warned to not think that riches are a sign of God’s favor or approval of them.

My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. James 2:1 (NASB)

How terrible it is for any rich believer to think highly of themselves in comparison to others because of their money. Yet that happens. Some individuals are even preaching that riches are a sign of God’s favor. It is a lie from hell. If riches are a sign of God’s favor, then why are some wicked people wealthy? So, the first principle is that rich believers are not to be conceited.

Principle 2 — Do Not Fix Your Hopes on Riches. Next, we are told in 1 Timothy 6:17 that rich believers are not to fix their hope on riches, but on God. The last part of the verse says that rich believers are not . . .

. . . to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. 1 Timothy 6:17b (NASB)

Any person can trust in their riches—the poor, the middle class, or the rich. Maybe they own parcels of land, rental properties, a financial portfolio, or a bank account. As a result, they think they will not suffer during difficult times. The sad part for any believer who has these thoughts is that God can take away what He has given them in a moment. The greater tragedy is that they are not trusting God.

Psalm 52:6-9 describes the righteous as laughing at the wicked who trust in their riches. Here is the passage,

The righteous will see and fear,
And will laugh at him, saying,
“Behold, the man who would not make God his refuge,
But trusted in the abundance of his riches
And was strong in his evil desire.”
But as for me, I am like a green olive tree in the house of God;
I trust in the lovingkindness of God forever and ever.
I will give You thanks forever, because You have done it,
And I will wait on Your name, for it is good, in the presence of
Your godly ones. Psalm 52:6-9 (NASB)

Here the wicked are pictured as happy with their abundance and evil desires. But the righteous trust in God’s love for them. As a result, they give Him thanks because He has made them like an olive tree. The righteous will wait on the Lord. That is, the righteous will not fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches but on God who supplies everything.

So, the first principle is that believers are not to be conceited or proud because of their money. The second principle is that believers are not to fix their hope on their riches, but on God who actually made them rich!

PRINCIPLE 3 — DO GOOD, BE GENEROUS AND SHARE.

The third principle is found in verses 18-19. Now rich believers are urged to share eagerly and generously. Verse 18 says,

Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share . . . 1 Timothy 6:18 (NASB)

In order to understand this verse correctly, we need to notice the meaning of the words “generous” and “ready.” The word “generous” comes from the Greek word *eumetadotos*. It has the idea of liberal or bountiful giving. The Greek word for “ready,” is *koinonikos*. It has the idea of willingness to share. So, believers are commanded to generously and willingly share their riches. There are a number of reasons why some believers may not share like this. But, I will give you at least three reasons.

First, some believers are driven by greed. Remember when Abraham and Lot were about to enter the Promised Land? Genesis 14 says that Abraham let Lot choose whatever part of the land he desired. Abraham was generous, and Lot was

greedy.

Lot desired the best. So, he chose the valley of the Jordan as his possession. Lot chose the best part of the land. He was greedy for the best. Then we are told that the land contained two very wicked cities - Sodom and Gomorrah. 2 Peter 2:7 tells us that later Lot was oppressed by the wickedness of unprincipled men. That is, Lot’s desire for the best land resulted in him suffering great emotional anguish. The verse does not mention the death of his wife and the incestuous behavior of his two daughters. Those events came as consequences of greed. In contrast, God blessed Abraham who was willing to let someone else have the best. So, greed is one reason why believers do not share.

The second reason a believer may not want to generously and willingly share is that they fear and worry about not having enough for themselves. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told us to not worry five times. He urged us to not worry about our life, the length of our life, our clothing, our food, and about tomorrow. Instead, He urges us to . . .

. . . seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Matthew 6:33 (NASB)

That is, believers should trust God. If they will, that will help them to generously and willingly share because that is God’s will for them. So, fear and worry is the second reason why some believers do not share.

The third reason a believer may not want to generously and willingly share is because they seek more satisfaction from the things of this world. Hebrews 11:25-26 tells us that Moses rejected the passing pleasures of this world and chose the riches of Christ. It connects pleasure and riches together.

Choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward. Hebrews 11:25-26 (NASB)

We need to remember that those who are not rich may not have given for the same reasons. But the message of Scripture is that rich believers should give more and more often. We are

to give as the Lord leads.

Verse 19 states that if believers will generously and willingly share, they will store up treasure in heaven for the future. The verse says,

... storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation
for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life
indeed. 1 Timothy 6:19 (NASB)

The Greek word for “storing up” refers to “hoarding” or “amassing a treasure.” That is, rather than amassing a great treasure on earth, the rich are to continually amass a great treasure in heaven. Why? Because our future is in heaven and not here on earth.

When Paul tells Timothy to “take hold,” he uses the same Greek word that he used in verse 12. In that verse, Timothy was told to take hold of eternal life. We discovered in verse 12 that “take hold” just means to “get a grip.” So, as rich believers habitually store up treasure in heaven, they will increasingly get a grip on the reality of their eternal life. They will live for eternal life and not for this life. Moses demonstrated that truth. He gave up the treasure of Egypt for Christ. The promise is true for all believers, but obviously they will not be able to give as much as the rich.

Contrary to the teaching of some, rich believers are not told to give their money away. If they gave everything away then they could not be generous and willingly share. We must remember that God never told Abraham, Issac, Jacob, King David, King Solomon or Job to give all of their money away either. But the verses in our study do tell us that wealthy believers are to generously and willingly share. That is, rich believers are not to be conceited, fix their hope on riches because of fear, worry, and a desire to guarantee satisfaction in this life. Instead all believers, especially rich believers, are to fix their hope on God and store up treasure in heaven.

CONCLUSION. Throughout Scripture, all believers are encouraged to help the poor, widows, and orphans who are truly are in need. We are to give to God through the church. In Luke 16:9, our Lord challenges us to give to spread the gospel. Jesus says that as we do this, we will make friends in heaven. That is but one type of treasure that we will receive.