

LASTING INVESTMENTS

1 Timothy 6:6-19

We live in a world of material things and have legitimate needs for our physical lives. However, the essential part of man in God's ultimate plan is spiritual. Consequently, a battle is going on between our physical and spiritual needs. Many of life's priority choices involve properly balancing these needs. In 1954 Abraham Maslow published a classic work on motivation and behavior. The basic premise for his work was that the driving force for behavior is **need**. Maslow saw that people have a "hierarchy of needs" that start with Physiological needs that are essential to survival. The needs progress from physical concerns of Survival and Safety, then to Psychological needs such as Affection and Esteem and finally to Pneumatological (spiritual) Self-fulfillment needs. In other words, we have needs in every expression of who we are – body, soul and spirit. He concluded that once primary needs are satisfied they cease to act as drivers and are replaced by needs of a higher order. The results would be that *higher order needs* are predominant when *primary needs* are satisfied. The worldly definition of "self-fulfillment" is *to utilize one's potential to the maximum, working with and for one's fellow beings*. A casual observer might have difficulty in distinguishing between a person who has achieved "self-fulfillment" and a Christian who is operating from a motive of unselfish love. How many people really achieve this idealized state of self-fulfillment? Not many! Why? They get stuck at a lower level in the hierarchy of needs. How much food, drink, clothing, shelter, or pay is enough?

How would people behave who have trouble getting beyond survival and safety needs? They might become very materialistic. They hoard things. They might buy clothes they don't need or have a compulsion to acquire a bigger house than they need. They might have to have two jobs to have enough money to feel secure. They might tear down their barns and build bigger ones.

A person may get beyond the "food, health, clothing, shelter, pay" set of needs but then get caught in the need to *belong*. Affection that results from belonging to a family unit or other small groups may fail to satisfy. Those who become "stuck" at this position might want to join every club, group, or organization they can. They may seek to establish multiple relationships beyond the family – that is, get involved in affairs.

Often our self-respect is tied to *achievement* and recognition of our accomplishments. How much recognition is enough? How much stroking does our "esteem" (read that as ego) need? People who get stuck at this level might be driven to accomplish wonderful things. There may be great scientific breakthroughs discovered. The need for recognition sometime drives great athletic ability. I sometime think that many who go into politics and run for office are motivated by the "esteem" need.

Is it possible for us to discover the Christian's hierarchy of needs? I believe that setting realistic priorities for our lives is difficult if not impossible, if we have not identified our goals or the things we want to accomplish. Successful businesses set goals and objectives and then "what is done" or "what is left undone" is determined by consideration of whether or not the action will help achieve the goal. But what about our personal lives? Should we have goals toward which we are working? Well, the saying that "If you don't know where you are going, you may wind up just anywhere," applies here. We can and should do better than that.

So often we feel inadequate to choose a goal for our lives and, consequently, do nothing about setting a destination or outcome for ourselves. God has given each of us a worthwhile goal. In Roman 8:29 we see that our ultimate goal is to be conformed to the image of Jesus.

This is the destination to which the “Christian walk” should be headed. If we stay on the right road, we arrive at the right destination. Sometime, we wander off the road and seem to lose our way. This is where knowing where we are going or knowing our needs is so important in helping us redirect our lives so that we reach the desired destination.

Paul began his letter to Timothy with a warning regarding false doctrines and controversial teaching and creating arguments about “minutia” rather than searching for the “spiritual significance” of what we read in the Scriptures and what we observe in life itself. As Paul concluded the letter he returned to this concern to emphasize the importance of staying on track and keeping focus on the objective of why Jesus came, why the church exists, and how we are to live our lives.

Those who lose focus of the real objective will find some other objective and that will normally be motivated by man’s fallen nature that is driven by selfish interests, pride and materialism. The temptations to take our attention away from seeking the Kingdom of God as our first priority bombard us all the time. Unless we are isolated and insulated from the world around us, then we constantly see enticements to “get more stuff” or “grab all the gusto” or “treat yourself extravagantly, because you are worth it.” A good spiritual discipline is to “simplify” our lives by setting our priorities on “things above and not on things of the earth, because we are dead and our lives are hidden with Christ in God.” (Col 3:2-3)

True Contentment – 6:6-10

⁶ But godliness *actually* is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. ⁷ For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. ⁸ If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. ⁹ But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. 1 Timothy 6:6-10 (NASB95)

Paul made good use of contrasts and comparisons in his letters. Paul had written Timothy about the false doctrines that some teachers of that day were proclaiming. One error that had crept into the church was that material success was evidence of godliness. Paul took this idea and turned it around to proclaim the great truth that “Godliness with contentment is great gain.” To accept this premise, we must have an appropriate goal for our lives and have defined what we mean by “success.” If our only definition of success is in terms of material possessions, then we will miss the point of Paul's premise. This condition results from being distracted and changing our focus from life’s ultimate goal to some other goal. The solution is to keep focused on Jesus since HE is the ultimate goal.

When we start trying to weigh the values and the benefits of one approach to life versus another, it could be said that the choices are temporal versus eternal. As Paul stated in verse seven, regarding material things, “you can't take it with you.” Some pagan religions taught that you could and so they would bury their dead with tools, utensils and weapons. We are somewhat amused by this and yet many people live their lives as if the material possessions had eternal importance.

God does intend for us to provide for the necessities of life. There are needs to be met; however, once these are satisfied, then we should move on to more noble considerations for our lives. From a practical standpoint, we cannot take the gospel to a person who is starving and freezing and expect him to appreciate the message until his basic needs are met. Putting what Paul said in terms of the “hierarchy of needs,” he would agree that “survival and safety” needs must be addressed.

Once our basic necessities are satisfied, then we must be careful to not let the desire to

have more and more drive us to harm ourselves (or others) in the process. Uncontrolled desire for material possessions and money can cause good people to do foolish and even evil things.

Paul said that the love of money is a cause of all manner of evil. We could move right up the hierarchy of needs and claim that the love (great desire) for “affection” is also a cause of all manner of evil. Social cliques, exclusive clubs, possessive friends, jealous spouses, and extramarital affairs are examples of how the love of “belonging” can control us and harm others. We could give examples of how the love for “esteem” could be a cause of all manner of evil.

True Riches – 6:11-16

¹¹ But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance *and* gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. ¹³ I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, ¹⁴ that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ which He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him *be* honor and eternal dominion! Amen. 1 Timothy 6:11-16 (NASB95)

When we are confronted with opportunities, challenges or threats in life, we have several options regarding the actions we could or should take. In the above passage we can pick out various actions by identifying the verbs Paul used. The verbs are flee, pursue, fight, seize, and keep.

Most people recognize that there are situations or temptations where the best response is to avoid the possibility of becoming vulnerable to the dangers that are associated with certain things. The proper verb to exercise in such cases is “flee.” The “things” to which Paul referred can be summarized as “foolish and harmful desires.” In addition to all the “things” previously discussed we could toss in sensuality issues. If we don’t allow ourselves to be exposed to such things, then we will not risk being plagued or controlled by such desires. When that happens, then a person winds up actually pursuing things that he or she knows are harmful. The action implied by the use of the verb “to flee” is more than just “casually walking away” but involves “fiercely” getting away.

If we are motivated to pursue anything, then there are many pursuits that are good and helpful. The list that Paul mentioned to Timothy reads like the “fruit of the Spirit” that we find in Paul’s letter to the churches of Galatia. Perhaps most of us have thought that the fruit of the Spirit is something that just happens and appears in our lives after we are saved. Consequently, we may wind up being somewhat passive with regard to these characteristics being evident in our lives. The proper perspective that Paul passed on to his protege is that we need to be actively, eagerly, and energetically (fiercely) involved in “making manifest,” “walking out,” or “working out” these evidences of the Spirit leading and working within us.

While there are some things in life from which we should flee, there other things for which we should fight. Paul wrote about the “fight of faith” which is likely to simply mean to fight for truth to be revealed and to replace false ideas and philosophies. In fact, the importance of truth is found in the exchange that Jesus had when He witnessed a good confession to Pontius Pilate. We see that He said “To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I might bear witness to the truth.” Once again, the choice of the word used by Paul (fight) gives us the idea of fierce intensity of what is being done.

The new life that results from being born of the Spirit of God is to be vigorously embraced (seized with both hands) and lived out in a victorious manner on an everyday basis. It is not something that we think about just on Sunday mornings or when we might be involved in a

religious retreat, but it is to fully and thoroughly impact what we know, our attitudes, our emotion and most certainly what we do.

The last verb Paul used was “to keep.” The idea is to preserve or faithfully take care of something. In this case the “something” is the “commandment.” Paul may have been referring to “fight the good fight of faith” or perhaps the entire message that he had just passed on to Timothy. Most commentators think that the phrase “without stain or blemish” was a reference to Timothy’s character and behavior rather than a concern about maintaining the truth of the message of the gospel. Whatever the intent, doing both is certainly appropriate for both message and messenger.

How are we to interpret what seems to be a time frame for keeping the message or ourselves without spot or blemish? This expression of doing something “until the appearing of the Lord Jesus” is generally thought to refer to the Second Coming of Christ or it may be looking forward to the Day of Judgment in which “purity” would be an important consideration.

Another consideration regarding keeping ourselves without spot or blemish could certainly be related to the fact that God is using all manner of things that we encounter in life to transform us into the image of Christ Who was (is) indeed without spot or blemish. As we mature in Christ, we are better able to see Him as He is and that spiritual sight (insight) should lead to our becoming more like Him. The more we are like Him, the easier it will be for others to see Jesus in us. Part of our witness to the world is wrapped up in how we are seen in making choices. Faithfulness in this arena is a way of confessing Christ before men.

Stewards of Good Works – 6:17-19

¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ *Instruct them* to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, ¹⁹ 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 6:17-19 (NASB95)

Most of the time we do not think of wealth as a responsibility but as a privilege; however, we see in this passage a call to do good (presumably with the wealth we do have) and be ready to share with others. Having wealth does not exempt us from doing good works and being personally involved in advancing the Kingdom of God. In fact, one might logically argue that the more material possessions we have, the more we should be able to accomplish by surrendering those possessions to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Having wealth can be spiritually dangerous in that it is our natural tendency to trust in our own wit and wealth.

As part of the closing charge to Timothy in the conduct of his pastorate at Ephesus, Paul reminded him of the trust that was placed in him. Timothy’s calling was to shepherd the church at Ephesus rather than take on the role of a reformer of the culture by frontally attacking it. The culture needed to be reformed and the only way that would effectively work would be transformation of the people who make up the culture. The work of the church is to impact lives of people so that the culture is changed from the grassroots level. For such a transformation to happen, all of us need to be engaged with intensity rather than just being passive. The action verbs that we talked about earlier all had a sense of fervor or even fierceness rather than indifference and apathy.

While the work of ministry is going on, it is important to avoid the temptation to become part of the culture by “going with the flow” of society. The alternative is to avoid the temptations that are all around us. How can we do that? Be selective in what you read, what you watch, the close associations you have, places you go, etc. He pointed to his priorities of proclaiming the word of God rather than arguing with people who just want to argue and those

who would try to use philosophical speculation to discredit the Bible. So-called intellectuals are still using this sort of error. Our starting premise must be that the Bible is right and then consider how our theories can fit in with the truth. We should not start with the theory and then try to make the Bible fit the theory.

Always we must be on guard to not get caught up in the desire for material things, selfish affections, or false esteem and we can do that if we keep focused on becoming all that God intends for us to be and getting ready for Jesus to appear. Proper focus on what is really important will free us to willingly use what God has provided to help others and to lead them to know Jesus.