

'You Are What You Love'

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[0 : 00] We're going to pray for his help as we look at these words. Let's pray. Our Father, we praise ye as the God of gods and the King of kings. And we thank ye that ye have so graciously spoken to us, that you've condescended to speak to us in words that we can understand. Father, we confess that our minds are dark, that we are often ignorant, that we struggle, our Father, to understand what ye have to say. So illuminate us, we pray.

Give us light. Shed light on your word, we ask. And more than that, by your Spirit, help us not only to understand, but to take to heart the message of your word this evening.

Lead us to the Lord Jesus, we ask. Lead us away from sinful desire, that we might rest our hearts and our faith in him. For this we ask in his name. Amen.

Well, as you might be able to tell, given that we are in chapter 6 of 1 Timothy, we are coming to the end of our series. We've just got this week and next week left in 1 Timothy.

I know that for some of you, that news will come as a relief. In some ways, this is an easy letter to understand, but it's certainly not an easygoing letter, is it? It's raised questions. It's got us talking about more than the weather, about who we are as a church, about what we do, about why we do it, about who it is we worship, how we worship him. It's made us think and talk about things, perhaps, in a new way, in a different way than we have before. And I'm really glad that it's done that.

[1 : 58] I'm really glad that there are questions, that we're talking about things. As Christians, we worship by the book. But of course, if Christianity was as simple as reading a book, while the church would have been spared a lot of pain through the ages, it's not easy. It challenges our thoughts, it stretches our hearts, because we are not yet conformed to God's will. It's challenged me as I've preached this letter. But surely when God speaks, his servants listen.

And as a response, we work hard to understand, to grapple with his word, how it should shape our lives and our church, because we know that whatever God says, he only speaks for our good and for his glory. As we come to the end, I've asked you throughout this series to think of Bon Accord in five or ten years' time, and ask, what would it take for us to survive and to thrive as a healthy gospel church? That's what this letter was written to help us to do. And so what I'd hate to happen as we finish 1 Timothy is for us to say, man, that was a tough workout. It was a difficult letter.

I'm so glad it's over. Now what's next for us? Now instead, let the sore muscles, let the painful bits tell us where our weaknesses are as a church. Keep asking, keep grappling with the truth of God's word, because surely that is what will help us in the coming years, to be who we are, to be the church of the living God, to live as God's family together. That's what this letter is all about. So, as I say, two more Sundays. And what does Paul have to say to us in two Sundays? Well, I think we could sum up this chapter, okay, this week and next. In the words of Jesus, when he says, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. What does that mean? Well, it means whatever we are living for, that is what we love. Okay, at face value,

Paul's concern in this passage is money, isn't it? Actual treasure. But his point is not really about money. Verse 10, just have a look. What's he concerned about is the love of money. Okay, money is what you treasure most, he says. Money is what will rule your heart, and money is therefore what will shape who you are. So, his concern is really what it is we love. I've borrowed the title for the sermon from a writer, James Smith, at the title of his book, You Are What You Love.

And his basic idea is this, who we are as people is not so much a product of how we think or how we behave or how we live, but a product of what we love. Who we are in our hearts is a result of what we have set our hearts on, he says. And so, what does that mean for us here tonight? Well, firstly, Paul wants us to see that self makes a terrible God, so do not give in to self-love. Self-love.

[5 : 42] Now, to set this in context, Paul's speaking into a conflict in the church. Remember, he set out in this letter how the church is to be faithful, how Timothy is to be faithful, because there are unfaithful, false teachers in the church that have twisted God's word and so corrupted the church.

And so, that's clearly who Paul's talking about there in verse 3, Luke. If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to God they're teaching, they are conceited and understand nothing. In its context, the lovers of self, the lovers of money in this letter are, in fact, ungodly church leaders. And the heart of the issue is that they've become so self-obsessed that they no longer are capable of listening to sound teaching. Let's see what Paul calls them in verse 4, conceited. I had to look that word up in a dictionary, conceited. We could say, I guess, these are people who have an over-inflated sense of self, an over-inflated ego.

We blow a lot of bubbles at home. If you visited us late in the afternoon on any given day, you might be greeted with bubbles and a very excited baby and a very excited dog who love to pop them.

Sometimes you can blow lots of very tiny and well-formed and neat spherical bubbles that they love dashing around after. But sometimes they let you go long enough to blow a really big giant bubble. But the problem with the big bubble is that it never really has a shape. It just wobbles about in the air for a few seconds, but it's unstable and it pops very quickly. It's obviously not going to last very long.

[7 : 46] And that is these guys, an over-inflated sense of self-importance that makes them unstable. The more hot air they blow into their ego, the more conceited they become, well, the more they understand nothing, therefore, and develop an unhealthy interest in controversies and conflict.

And that can happen to people, can't it? People can be like that big, unstable, wobbly bubble. If you've ever had a conversation like that where the person you're talking to isn't really talking to you, they're only actually interested in what they have to say.

And however you try to reply or to respond to them, it just doesn't register because it's not what they think. They're just there to talk at you, not to listen. And in fact, you realize the only reason they're actually talking to you at all is because they enjoy arguing with somebody.

It puts more hot air in the ego. Sometimes those people are called steamrollers. They're coming to blindly flatten you, no matter what you say.

And the problem with that kind of self-obsession, self-love, is not only, says Paul, that it creates conflict, but that it deafens those people to the one that they really need to listen to.

[9 : 16] Because whose words bounce off them, verse 3? Not just Paul's. Look, the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The problem is it's the words of Jesus that don't get through. And so on the biggest possible level, okay, at this point in the letter, Paul's warning us of the danger of a self-love that hardens our hearts against the truth of Jesus.

In what sense could self-love deafen us to Jesus? Well, one of the most popular ideas people have about Jesus, perhaps you've heard this, perhaps you think this yourself this evening, is that Jesus was simply a kind of good teacher who taught lots of good things.

But if we read what Jesus taught, what he said, well, he's constantly challenging our most precious ideas about ourselves, isn't he?

We read earlier in our service how Jesus challenges our self-reliance, our sense of independence, challenges our anxieties.

[10 : 34] There's lots in us that Jesus teaches us to give up and instead to put our trust in him, to follow and trust and love him. And so I always find it surprising when people who are not Christians tell me that they think Jesus is a really good teacher.

I want to ask, do you know what he taught? If you do, then why don't you trust him? Why don't you follow him? Perhaps that's you here this evening.

You think well of Jesus, but you don't trust him with your life. And Paul would ask you, could it be that what's getting in the way then is perhaps self-love, pride, conceit?

Do we love talking about religious things? Do we love coming to church, but in our hearts we know that we are not prepared to change no matter what Jesus says?

Friends, do not let that be you. Don't settle for religious discussion and debate. Listen and learn from Jesus Christ.

[11 : 49] Perhaps that is something that preachers and teachers need to hear often. We love a hot debate, a hot topic, but we can all fall into that trap, can't we, of loving our own opinions more than

that we are willing to listen to Jesus.

Perhaps tonight you need to ask him, perhaps for the first time, perhaps afresh, to unblock your ears so that you can hear his voice, to unblock your heart so that you can believe it and live it. But Paul now gets down into a more specific issue. It's one of the things Jesus challenges us most in his teaching, and it's one of self-love's favorite disguises.

What mask does our self-love most often put on? Well, in Ephesus back then, and often still today, it is a love of money. Okay, see that in verse 7, Luke?

These conceited false teachers, well, in their self-love, they think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

[13:01] So Paul's second point is that money makes a terrible God. Okay, we selves, ourselves, we make terrible gods. Money makes a terrible God. And if we're Christians, it's quite easy, I guess, to see that loving ourselves isn't godliness.

Okay, we can still maybe deceive ourselves that it's fine, but we know in our heart that it is not. Whereas when a love of money disguises our self-love, then it is much harder to see it as an issue in our lives.

What's wrong, we say, with wanting more money? Well, the question that Paul wants to ask us is, why do we want more money? Why do we want more money?

It's the question nobody's asking, is it? In our culture, it's expected, assumed, that we must always want more. Nobody asks why.

But is it, for a Christian, is that our natural disposition? Is that our natural posture towards possessions? What is a Christian's natural posture towards our wealth?

[14:12] Well, Paul tells us, verse 6, actually, godliness, loving God, goes with contentment. Contentment. Godliness with contentment is great gain.

Contentment, satisfaction. That is the natural posture of a Christian towards wealth. Now, how can loving God give us greater gain in life than loving money?

That's the natural question for us to ask, isn't it? Maybe we are asking it now. What is there in it for me? To love God rather than to go out and get a better job, more money, a better life, a better house, whatever.

Well, here are four reasons that Paul gives us. To love God rather than love money. And the first reason is in verse 7, where he says, we brought nothing into the world and can take nothing out of it.

As much as human beings from the ancient Egyptians onwards have loved to stuff coins, personal effects into coffins. We know, don't we, that that stuff stays in the ground.

[15:26] If it's there long enough, it goes to the British Museum. Okay, but that's about it. But what we forget often, or spend our lives ignoring perhaps, is that our money also stays in the bank, and our house stays on the street, and our car stays in the garage.

I was reading this week about John Rockefeller. He's widely thought to be the richest, one of the richest, if not the richest man in history. Okay, in 1913, his net wealth was estimated to be \$900 million.

In today's money, that's about \$23.5 billion. Now, that might not sound like much on today's rich list, but back then, as a percentage of kind of global wealth at the time, well, he was far richer than even the wealthiest person alive today.

And so, when Rockefeller died in 1937, a savvy journalist asked one of his aides how much he'd left behind, I guess assuming that he'd be told a very large figure, when in fact he was told a fact.

All of it, he said. All of it. Isn't that the truth? There are some people here who are very good with numbers, some very gifted accountants.

[17:01] But in the final assessment, the maths is pretty simple, isn't it? How much do we really own? Well, Paul would have us ask two questions. How much did you come with?

And how much are you going to leave with? The answer to both questions is nothing. And so, therefore, friends, how much do we gain by loving money?

Surely only the stress and anxiety that comes from wanting more money, but nothing else. If life is about financial gain, we are all losers in the end.

We all lose that gain. How, then, do we gain in life in a way that we can't lose? Well, secondly, says Paul, verse 8, if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.

What we gain by loving God, he says, is contentment, knowing that we have enough, and not wanting or needing to have more than we have. Now, Paul's clearly thinking here of Jesus' words, isn't he, that we read earlier.

[18:07] Do not worry, saying, what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or what shall we wear? For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

He knows. He knows our needs. Food, clothes, basic sustenance. Our Lord Jesus teaches us that God has us covered. He noticed that we are all fully clothed tonight.

I think I can assume that we've all had something to eat. We all have somewhere to live, however temporary that place is. We all got here somehow. Well, Jesus asks, what more do we think we need?

What more do we think we need? If we can trust in this God through Jesus, we can have a peace and contentment in life that no amount of money can possibly, possibly give.

I read another article this week about research into the links between wealth and happiness. In one study, the researcher asked 2,000 people how happy they were on a scale of 0 to 10, and how much more money they would need to be a 10.

[19:23] And without fail, he said, at every band of income, the answer that all these people gave was that they thought that they would need two to three times more money than they already had to be perfectly happy.

Okay, and here's the bit that got me, okay, the sucker punch. The minimum worth of everybody in this survey was at least a million dollars.

Okay, this was a survey of millionaires, but not one of them was content. They all felt they needed two to three times more money to be completely satisfied.

If I asked you now, would an extra million pounds make you happy? I expect that you would tell me, yes, it would. But people who have a million pounds say, no, it wouldn't.

And friends, learn from their experience. Okay, people who have been there, being content is not about how much money we have. It is about who or what we love.

[20:31] Okay, if we love money, there is no amount of money that will ever satisfy. We will always be chasing it. And so Jesus would urge us, would he not, to trust and rest instead in God's fatherly care, to thank him each day for his provision, and not to worry about getting more for tomorrow, because he promises to give us just what we need each and every day.

When we love God, we can be content in all circumstances, with a lot or a little, because we know each day where our meals are coming from. We know the one who provides for us.

Now, the third reason Paul tells us loving God is great again is there in verse nine. Okay, he's told us money can't make us, but now he tells us money can break us.

Look, those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.

Now, to be clear, this doesn't say, does it, that money is the root of all evil. That's often how this is misquoted. But the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.

[21:55] That much is true. You don't have to look far to see that, do you? Just the terrible things that people do out of a love of money. Why do huge global industries exist to produce pornography, to traffic human beings, to deal drugs, not because these things have ever satisfied anyone, but because these things make some people very, very rich.

not to mention the sorts of lengths that people will go to to guard and to increase their wealth, fraud and gambling, incredible debt.

It is no overstatement for Paul to say that wanting to get rich routinely, routinely turns otherwise intelligent people into fools and plunges them into ruin and destruction.

It's well known, isn't it, that winning the lottery has a high possibility of ruining your life. But then why do people play? Why would you play a game that has the risk of ruining your life?

Because we all tell ourselves, don't we, that a love of money won't ruin me and my family, but it does. In real life, it does. And it would be easy to think, you know, this is all kind of happening out there in the big wide world.

[23:24] Can't happen in a church, can it? Well, listen to Paul's final reason that loving God is great again than loving money in verse 10. Some people eager for money have wandered from the faith, wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Okay, who is he talking about? Not people out there, people in here, people in the church, professing Christians who have slowly but surely ended up leaving God for money.

The promotion comes along that they cannot turn down, that takes them away from their church, away from their devotion, away from Christ. Or perhaps they won't be offered the promotion if they don't put in the hard hours now, or the dream job comes up somewhere else that takes them and their family away from their church, and they have no time to connect with a new body of believers. Could that ever be you? Paul says it could. Remember the seed in Jesus' parable that grew up in the thorns.

What are the thorns? Remember, listen to Jesus. Still others like seeds sown among the thorns. Hear the word like we are doing now, but ready for this. The worries of life, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.

[24 : 55] Could that be us? Let us pray that it is not. We can try to serve God and money, but Jesus tells us, doesn't he, that it cannot be done.

And I hope we can see, okay, that this is not just a question of not working when we should be at church. It's a far deeper question than that, isn't it? What do you love?

What are you living for? What is your heart set on? Is it Christ and his word? Or have the worries of life, the love of money, the desire for other things taken over your affections?

Well, friends, God wants us to know that money makes a terrible, terrible God of our lives. It pretends it can give us everything. And in fact, not only can it not give us everything, but it can take everything away.

I want to just press this in a wee bit further for a couple of groups here tonight. Okay, and the first is for those of you who are at the start, okay, setting out students, young workers, people early on.

[26 : 04] Okay, learn this truth early. Take this to heart. You are in a tricky time of life. What happens next? Where will you go? Where will you work?

How will you live? Now, without using words, the world will prey on those worries and teach you that at the start of your career, this is the time to work like crazy.

Go where the work is. Okay, do whatever it takes to get in and to stay in. Okay, work stupid hours to get ahead. Get your foot in the door. Because here's the lie at the root of that fear that if you do not sell your soul to your work and live for your paycheck, you are not going to survive.

Is that not the fear? You know, I spoke to a student once, okay, not a student here, who's just experiencing overwhelming anxiety to do with his studies.

And as he talked, he explained his anxiety like this. If I don't work this hard now, I'm not going to get a decent degree, which means I'm not going to get the job I want, which means I'm not going to have a happy life.

[27 : 17] His whole hope for his future rested on his next grade. No wonder he was anxious. Sadly, he actually had to take a break from his degree because the anxiety was too much to handle.

Now, hard work is not in itself a sin, but let me urge you not to believe the lie that if you're going to survive in the world of work, that you must serve money while you are young.

Okay, the Christian version of that adds or bolts onto that lie. Don't worry, because once you're kind of set up in life and you've got enough stuff, well, then you can serve God.

Then you can get back involved with church. No, Paul is telling ye that that is utter foolishness. Utter foolishness.

The reality is, if you serve money, you will never have enough. And by the time you imagine that you have enough, you will have served the God of money for so long that serving the living God will not interest you, will not interest you anymore.

[28 : 23] So while you are young, friends, learn this now. Love and serve God and spare yourself a lifetime of worry, anxiety, and trouble.

For godliness with contentment brings far greater gain. The other group I just want to press this in on a wee bit further is those maybe a bit further ahead in life, in your career.

You've been working for years, you've got mortgages to pay, perhaps you've got children to feed, you've got lots to pay for. And I just want to linger on this because the struggle for your heart doesn't end, does it, when you reach a certain age.

The pattern is normally, I guess, in many careers, you work for so long, you get more responsibility, you step up the ladder, you earn more.

And there's huge pressure, isn't there, to keep going, to keep climbing, to take on more work, to earn more money. That pressure is even greater now, isn't it, when our money doesn't go as far, perhaps, as it did a few years ago.

[29 : 33] But Paul is saying, before you do that, just pause, ask yourself, why you feel you need to do that. Okay, is it because you need to? Or is it because chasing that promotion is what the world expects us to do?

Is it because saying no to a higher salary isn't the done thing? Ask yourself, just regularly, who am I serving in my work?

Paul teaches us in Colossians, doesn't he, that even in the workplace, you are serving the Lord Christ. So ask yourself, just periodically, am I?

Or am I serving me, my life, my income? These are huge pressures, aren't they? But Paul would have us know that not chasing after money is not a sacrifice that we make in the Christian life.

Okay, it is something that God has freed us from in Christ so that we can know the far greater gain of contentment, satisfaction in what he is pleased to give us day by day in all that he has done for us and continues to do.

[30 : 49] Because he reminds us finally and ever so briefly that it is God himself, God himself, who is our only true good. Okay, this is from verse 11.

But ye, man of God, flee from all this. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith.

Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. So Paul's calling Timothy, isn't he, to turn and just run the other way from the false teachers, to run the way of Christ and the gospel, the way of eternal life.

In a sense, this is the call that runs through this whole letter, isn't it, for the church to love and to serve the living God and not a false God created by false teaching.

And towards the end, Paul is reminding Timothy just who our God is. Look at verse 13, he charges Timothy in the sight of God who gives life to everything.

[31 : 56] Our God is the creator. The God we serve is the God in whom all things live and move and have their being. The giver of life, the giver of every good and every perfect gift.

We have no good whatsoever apart from this God. And he is the God who reveals himself to us in Jesus Christ, who Paul reminds Timothy as he stood on trial for his life, spoke of a kingdom, a kingdom not of this world, but an eternal kingdom of which he was the king, a kingdom of life and light which we come into through his suffering and death.

This is the great and majestic and gracious and generous God and king you serve, Timothy, says Paul. And so live your life under his care, in his strength, out of his fullness and do not turn to any other thing for your contentment.

Okay, this is a solemn charge to church leaders in particular, but for all of us, if we are Christians, this call comes for us to love God with our whole heart and soul and mind and strength.

And if you are not a Christian, well, it comes to you as a call to turn and to flee from the love of self and to flee from the love of money and to turn to the Lord Jesus Christ and take hold of him personally because he is the only true and lasting good thing that we can hope in for this life and for the next.

[33 : 43] In him, we find eternal life. And Paul holds out that eternal life to us in Jesus Christ tonight for the taking.

Towards the end of his life, John Rockefeller wrote a short poem that expressed how this faith, this very faith had shaped his own life and work.

He wrote, I was early taught to work as well as play. My life has been one long happy holiday full of work and full of play. I dropped the worry on the way for God was good to me every day.

What was it that gave the richest man in history a full and happy life? Well, according to him, it was not his wealth, it was not his work, but it was this God and the fact that he had been good to him in Jesus Christ as he gave his one and only son to die for him and to be raised for him so that he might have eternal life, life in all its fullness, now and forever.

And that is the life that God holds out to each of us this evening. Would you take hold of it and know life to the full today and into eternity?

[35 : 11] Let's pray for that together now. Gracious Father, we thank you that the world we see around us is not all that there is to hope in.

Our Father, we know the emptiness of putting our trust in worldly things, in our possessions, in our work, in our studies, in our own lives.

Father, help us, we pray, by your spirit to flee from these things. keep our hearts from loving these things. Father, it is so difficult not to love what we see in the world.

Help us instead, our Father, to hear your word, to hear the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to love him. Father, we thank you that you offer us a far greater gain in this life than anything this world can offer.

our Father. And Father, we pray now for each of us here that we would know that great gain of satisfaction in you, that we each would know eternal life in Jesus Christ, that you, even now, our Father, would grant faith to those who do not have faith to take hold of eternal life in Christ and to live this life of contentment, trusting in you.

[36 : 44] Help us all, we pray, to know how good it is to know ye and to shed the love of this world. For this we pray and ask in Jesus' name.

Amen.