

Henry Ow  
A Rightly Ordered Church  
1 Timothy 6:17-21

#### INTRODUCTION

1. Image: I pay less attention now when I drive than my initial days of learning how to drive.
2. Need: When we've grown accustomed to doing things, we become complacent.
3. Subject: How do we guard against becoming a complacent church?
4. Text: 1 Timothy 6:17-21
5. Preview: There are two things we need to avoid.

#### BODY

- I. Avoid making wealth everything (6:17-19)
  - A. An overconfidence in wealth leads to pride (6:17a)
  - B. Wealth is temporal, but God's provision lasts (6:17b)
  - C. Use your wealth to serve others (6:18-19)
    1. Look for opportunities to be generous (6:18)
    2. Generous stewardship leads to heavenly reward (6:19)
- II. Avoid making knowledge everything (6:20-21)
  - A. Knowledge without application leads to spiritual danger (6:20b-21)
  - B. Doing spiritual things is as important as knowing spiritual things (6:20a)
  - C. Put into practice what you know.

#### Conclusion

1. Review: Avoid making wealth everything. Avoid making knowledge everything.
2. Closing Image: A mission couple returning from the field devoted the husband's 6-figure salary to the work of missions.

MANUSCRIPT

I don't know if you're like me. **But I pay less attention now when I drive than my student driving days.** I still remember those first days of driving. My mind ran through a mental check list of things to do. Am I buckled up? Check. Keys in the ignition? Check. Foot on brakes? Check. Hands at 11 o'clock position and 2 o'clock positions? Check. Turn ignition? Check. Release parking brake? Check. Shift car into gear? Check. It took me at least five minutes to get out of the drive way of my house with my instructor that first day because I had to go through this mental check list. My mind was more mentally alert. Whenever I came into an intersection, I looked to my left and right. I looked at my rearview mirror. When I drove as a student driver, I paid attention to everything.

But those days of student driving are gone. When I get into the driver's seat of my car, everything happens automatically. Sometimes, I am unaware of what my body is doing. On some Saturdays, I find myself driving to church when I should be headed to the grocery store.

Driving for so long has made me complacent. I have turned off the engine forgetting to shift the car into park. I don't look in my rearview mirror twice before I reverse. This led to me nearly getting into some accidents in the HEB parking lot. As I became more comfortable with driving, the less attentive I became.

**When we've grown accustomed to doing things, we become more complacent.** Take driving for example. When you grow accustomed to driving, some of you feel comfortable to put on make-up on the way to work. Others of you text as you drive. **When we grow accustomed to doing things, we become complacent.**

I wonder if we've also grown accustomed to doing church. We go to small groups once a week. We share enough to seem transparent but withhold what's really going on in our lives. We attend worship services on Sunday mornings. We recite the creeds. We repeat the confession. We sing the songs. We raise our hands at the right time. We stand and sit when told. We just go through the motions. When we grow accustomed to doing church, we become spiritually complacent. We don't exercise discernment on what goes on in our spiritual life. Church just becomes another thing to do on a weekly check list.

How do we avoid being a complacent church? How do we not be a church that merely goes through the motions? How do we be members who are intentional in what we do at church?

When Paul writes the letter of 1 Timothy, he instructs Timothy to be vigilant. He needs to watch out for false teaching infiltrating the Ephesian church. If the Ephesian church allowed false teaching to affect the way that the church conducted itself, then it will fail to be distinct from the world. The church would fail to carry out its mission to be a pillar of truth and testament to the gospel.

This morning we'll turn our attention to the closing verses of 1 Timothy, chapter 6. Please turn with me there. 1 Timothy. Chapter 6. Verse 17. 1 Timothy. Chapter 6. Verse 17.

As we come to the closing verses of this letter, we'll see Paul warn the Ephesian church to avoid two areas that could lead to complacency. We need to look out for two things. There are two things we need to avoid.

What is the first thing we need to avoid? **Avoid making wealth everything.** Don't trust too much in what you own. If we find too much security in what we own such as our 401K

accounts, investments, properties, or different assets, then we need to be on guard. Be wary of how you view what you own. **Avoid making wealth everything.**

Why do we need to avoid making wealth everything? Paul warns us that **an overconfidence in wealth leads to pride**. When we believe that what we own can shelter us from trouble, we may be tempted to be proud. Look with me at the first half of verse 17: *“As for the rich in his present age, charge them not to be haughty.”* Note how Paul addresses those who are rich within the Ephesian church. As we’ve gone through the letter of 1 Timothy, we’ve seen allusions to wealthy members of the church. In 1 Timothy, chapter 2, verse 9, we see Paul encourage the wealthy ladies to dress modestly. It says: *“likewise also the women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire.”* Within the New Testament, we read of other wealthy Christians: Zaccheus the former tax collector, Barnabas who sold his land to give the proceeds to the church, or Lydia who was a seller of purple cloth. The Old Testament is also filled with believers, who were wealthy. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Job are just some examples. It’s not wrong to be wealthy. For God does bless those who follow him. Yet the statement: *“Because I am a Christian, God must bless me with wealth”* is wrong. But it is also wrong to desire wealth because of what you think it might provide such a security, power, or influence. That’s why Paul writes earlier: *“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils.”*

Now many of you may think, I don’t need to worry about an overconfidence in wealth. I’m not wealthy. And it’s true depending on the context. According to a survey by Charles Schwab, one would need a net worth of \$2.4 million dollars to be wealthy in the United States. If that’s the case, then many of us don’t need to worry about being wealthy. We are well below

that type of worth. What happens if you compare your assets to the rest of the world?

According to one website: "I remember the poor", it states that if you currently have \$2200 dollars to your name you are in the top 50% of the world's wealthiest. If you made \$1500 last year, you are in the top 20% of the world's income earners. If you earn \$25,000 or more annually, then you are in the top 10% of the world's income-earners. If we compare our income to the rest of the world, then many of us would be considered wealthy.

How do you tell that wealth has made you proud? You know that you've become proud when you look down at others who are at lower income bracket as you. You find yourself standing just a little bit taller when you share your occupation as a doctor, lawyer, or engineer. You feel satisfied when you receive your pay check and think to yourself: "I earned every penny of it."

Pride associated with wealth could make you spiritually complacent. Look at the nation of Israel during the times of Judges. Every time, Israel entered into a season of prosperity it turned away from the Lord. When Solomon became prosperous, his heart turned away from the Lord. If we find pride in our wealth, then we could potentially find our hearts less dependent on the Lord and cold to him. Who needs God, when I've done all these great things.

What do we need to know in order to prevent us from being proud of our wealth?  
What kind of perspective do we need to be humble?

**Wealth is temporal, but God's provision lasts.** What you have will not last forever. Everything has an expiration date. God's promise to care for you, on the other hand, will last forever. **Wealth is temporal, but God's provision lasts.**

Read with me in 1 Timothy, chapter 6, verse 17: *“nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.”*

The worth of your wealth can change overnight. A retirement account worth millions could be worth thousands if United States economy takes a turn for the worse. You may have money invested in real estate, but a natural disaster could cost you thousands in repair. A troublesome tenant could cost you money especially if they don't pay rent and you have to evict them. If your health takes a turn for the worse, then you may end up spending thousands for treatment and rehabilitation. Wealth comes in certain seasons, it could also go in other seasons.

It reminds me of a parable told by Jesus in Luke 12. A farmer had a bumper crop of wheat. When he harvested all the wheat from his field, he encountered a problem. He couldn't store all the wheat. He calls in the local carpenter and they begin to make plans on how to expand the barns and build up new silos. One night as he's finalizing plans for the new silos, he begins to feel his chest tighten. It's kind of odd, so he gets up from the table to get a drink of water. Before he can grab a cup of water, he black out and he collapses on the floor. His wife finds him on the floor the next day dead from a heart attack. This farmer who planned on living out his life in comfort had his life taken from him. You never know how long you have to live. If you keep on amassing wealth, you may not live even long enough to use it. Jesus calls such a person: “A fool...”

Following this parable Jesus teaches that God takes care of his people. If God cares for the birds of the air, then God will care for his people. He will ensure that you will have enough to eat and something to wear. It may not be what you want to eat. But you'll never go hungry.

How do we know that God will care for us? How do we know God will provide? We look to the provision for our sins. If God sent his Son to die for our sins, then we can trust that he will also provide for our daily needs.

How do we live out this truth: “**Wealth is temporal, but God’s provision lasts**”? How do we apply it to our lives?

**Use your wealth to serve others.** Utilize your assets to be a blessing to other people. Invest your money, time, and resources in God’s work to reach the lost and serve the outcast.

**Use your wealth to serve others.**

Read with me in verse 18: “*They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous ready to share.*” We see this in other parts of 1 Timothy as well. In 1 Timothy, chapter 5, Paul gives instruction for the Ephesian church to care for its widows financially. This is an echo of what happens in Acts 6, when deacons are appointed to care for widows in the Jerusalem church. The church should be known for its charity rather than its opulence.

**Look for opportunities to be generous.** Find ways to help others both outside and inside the church. **Look for opportunities to be generous.**

What would this look like? This is the time in the year when many of our members are participating on short term mission trips. If you receive a support letter from one of our members, then you might want to consider supporting them financially.

If you’re a member of the church, then you may want to consider regular giving. There are many ways for you to give financially to the church whether it be the offertory in service, the offertory boxes, or even online. As I’ve said in the past, offering is an opportunity to express our thanksgiving and praise to God.

If you're a student, then you may be thinking: "I don't have any money..." Practicing generosity requires some sacrifice. Instead of spending \$5 dollars on that extra cup of Boba or coffee each week, you might want to consider using that money toward supporting a missionary for the summer.

What happens when we develop a life style of generosity? **Generous stewardship leads to heavenly reward.** When we use our resources to help others, we may make an investment in a heavenly bank account. Jesus calls it: "storing up our treasures in heaven." **Generous stewardship leads to heavenly reward.**

Paul writes about it in verse 19: *"thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life."* Paul's use of the word: "treasure" echoes Jesus's usage when he talks about the wisdom of investing your money in a place where moth and rust do not destroy.

The word foundation refers to construction. In order to build a home, you need to first lay a strong foundation. If you lack a sturdy foundation, then any type of storm or disaster could destroy your home. If one maintains a generous practice of giving and helping others, then he or she establishes a solid practice of living for eternity rather than this present world.

Moreover, when Paul talks about "that which is truly life." He refers to eternal life. A person who uses his or her wealth generously has his eyes set on eternity rather than the present.

What is this treasure? What is this eternal reward? I can't say that you'll receive homes or jewels in heaven. But I do know that you will receive commendation from the Lord. For one who stewards what has been given him well will hear the words: "Well done. Good and faithful



servant.” You may be thinking: “That’s it!?” But don’t we desire commendation? We want to hear people speak our praises at work. “You did a great job on that project!” “You are essential to our work effort”. We want to hear commendation at our graduations. “Summa Cum Lade!” “Magna Cum Lade!” “Graduated with honors!” Some have always longed to hear our earthly fathers say: “I’m proud of you!” “I am so proud to be your father!” If we desire to hear our earthly father’s praise, then how wonderful will it be when we hear the commendation our heavenly father.

How do we guard against complacency? First, **avoid making wealth everything**. What is the second thing that we need to avoid?

**Avoid making knowledge everything**. As believers, we sometimes, mistake knowing more about God as spiritual growth. While there is no doubt that growing in our spiritual walk leads to learning more about God, we may think the Christian faith is just about gathering more information about God. **Avoid making knowledge everything**.

Why is the pursuit of pure knowledge dangerous? **Knowledge without proper application leads to spiritual danger**. For example, the Pharisees are an example of people who knew the law. But they didn’t properly apply the law. This led to them leading a legalistic lifestyle believing that their personal rules would lead to them being close to God. In reality, such a life style led them far from God. **Knowledge without proper application leads to spiritual danger**.

For Paul writes in the second half over verse 20 the following: *“Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called “knowledge”, for by professing it some have*

*swerved from the faith.*" Throughout the book of 1 Timothy, we see Paul addressing the false teaching at Ephesus.

What is this "knowledge"? Some of the false teachers attempted to trace their genealogies to determine their bloodlines. Yet he calls this type of speculation foolish. The false teachers had an incorrect understanding of the law misapplied it. Moreover, we see the emergence of a dualistic thinking: the flesh is bad and the spirit is good. We see this in 1 Timothy 4, verse 3 which says: "*who forbid marriage and require abstinence from food that God created to be received.*" These false teachers attempted to search for some kind of secret knowledge that would train them to escape their fleshly appetites. Hence, they encouraged the church to withhold from interacting with the world and become an enclave. Their improper teaching led to lifestyles that contradicted the teachings of Christ. In the verses above, Paul describes these false teachers as conceited and not really understanding anything. These conversations about knowledge cause envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions and constant friction (6:6).

Knowledge that doesn't lead to a greater love for God and neighbor is a knowledge that could be divisive. Often times our discussion about secondary matters such as worship styles, consumption of alcohol, Bible translations, and so forth if not done with charity could result in hostility between brothers and sisters in Christ. Knowledge should not lead us to be hostile toward other believers especially if they disagree concerning secondary issues.

What principle will help us guard against such dangers? What helps us to avoid allowing our knowledge to cause dissension.

**Doing spiritual things is as important as knowing spiritual things.** It's important to believe what we know and to apply it. We need to learn to share it with others. It should affect our lives and how we interact with the world. **Doing spiritual things is as important as knowing spiritual things.**

Paul writes to Timothy one last command in verse 20: *"O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you."* What is the deposit? The deposit refers to something that has been given to Timothy's care. Paul had entrusted the sound doctrine into the care of Timothy. This sound doctrine didn't only include right thinking about God, but also right behavior stemming from it. If you recall the key verse of 1 Timothy is found in chapter 3, verse 14 thru 15: *"But I am writing these things to do you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of truth."* Notice that Paul uses the phrase: *"you may know how one ought to behave"*. Paul is not just concerned with the fact that the Ephesian church knew the right things. But he wanted the church to display their right thinking through what they do. That's why, Paul spends so much time writing in 1 Timothy about the proper practices of the church: *"How should men and women pray? How should leaders be chosen? How should Timothy equip the church? How should the church treat its widows and elders?"*

Unfortunately, the Ephesian church was in danger of being a church known for its sound theology and not by their sound application. When the apostle John writes to the church of Ephesus in the book of revelation, he has this to say. It's found in Revelation chapter 2, verse 2 thru 4: *"I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but you have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and*

*found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you that you have abandoned the love you had at first."* Jesus calls the Ephesian church out for being doctrinally sound. But that doctrine did not increase their love for Christ nor their love for people. If we are not careful, then we may be known as a knowledgeable church rather than a church that loves God and loves people. Don't allow the knowledge of God make your heart grow cold to him.

What should we do? If we know practice is just as important as knowledge. What is the application?

**Put into practice what you know.** From what you have learned about God, what are you going to do about it. How does what you know inform what you do? **Put into practice what you know.**

You may know a lot about the Christian faith. You may know a little. It doesn't quite matter so much as you do something with what you know. When I heard my mom became a believer, I doubted whether or not this was a genuine conversion. After all, my mom only has an eighth-grade reading comprehension. Reading the Bible is extremely difficult for her. I kept on thinking: would she be able to understand the ideas of the trinity, sanctification, and the like.

But I remember my mom recalling a time with her co-workers. She had just become a believer. Her co-workers tried to convince her not to go to church. They complained about how believers didn't care for their families. The church is only interested in collecting your money. It's a waste of your time so and so forth. Of course, I wondered if my mom would be convinced by their arguments or mount a defense of Christianity on her own. Her apologetic

was this: “I don’t know. Why don’t you come with me to church to find out?” Her simple question floored me. Yes, she may know the *ordus salutis* or the order of salvation. But she knew enough to invite her friend to church and allow God to do the talking. While my mom is not an evangelist, I’m surprised by how she is faithful in inviting others to explore the Christian faith.

How do we guard against becoming a complacent church? **First, avoid making wealth everything. Second, avoid making knowledge everything.** This is Paul’s charge to the rich: the rich in wealth and rich in knowledge.

I reminded about a couple that I learned about at an OMF event. The facilitator shared about a missionary couple who returned home from the field because the wife had some medical issues. The wife was a teacher. The husband worked as an engineer. When they returned home, they resumed their original professions. As a teacher the wife earned a reasonable salary. The husband as an engineer earned a six-figure salary. They decided as a couple that though they were unable to return overseas they would set aside the husband’s six-figure salary to support the work of missions overseas. They would live off the wife’s teacher’s salary. This was a couple that stewarded their resources in a radical way. Knowing God’s heart for the nations, they did something about it as well.