



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

“In 1 Tim. 6:10 Paul speaks about the danger associated with riches. Are we to understand that there is no evil unconnected with the love of money?”

HERE the questioner quite precisely equates riches with money and infers that the dangers, whatever they may be, spring from a compulsive love of money. This is a very important question, especially in these days, and demands a somewhat detailed answer if the teaching of Paul is to have its full impact.

What is being said?

It is always advantageous to try to understand precisely what we are asking or saying and what God through His word is saying to us. When we speak about money we are speaking about current coin or promissory documents representing it. Consequently in Acts 3:6 Peter is speaking about Gold and silver coin. In Matt. 26:15 the chief priests covenanted with Judas to give him thirty pieces of silver coin, i.e., a sum of money. Paul states that people can love money and he expresses this by the word PHILARGURIA, from PHILEO, to love, and ARGUROS, silver, and he means that they covet money in an avaricious sense.

The word ‘riches’ is a more comprehensive word. As applied to persons it means that they are wealthy, i.e., having an abundance or profusion of anything. If riches is related exclusively to money then it would mean that a person had an abundance, or large possessions of money. Hence, such a person would be similar to those mentioned by Jesus as recorded in Matt. 19:23. The reader should note here that Jesus does not say it is impossible for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven, but rather that a person who trusts in riches will find difficulty or opposition in entering the kingdom. I think we should also understand that not all types of riches have attendant dangers. The N.T. speaks about riches which it would be desirable for us to acquire, but we will return to this a little later.

The word ‘evil’ also needs some clarification in the context of what we are studying. In 1 Tim. 6:10 the word used is KAKOS which stands for whatever is evil in character; that which is base. The word PONEROS denotes that which is evil in influence and effect, malignant. When this word is used as a noun it refers to Satan, as in Matt. 13:19,38.

It seems to me that the word ‘root’ is also an important one to our understanding. If we relate root to a plant or tree it would seem to suggest that the root is the source of the plant or tree, but this is not true, is it? We have to put the plant, roots and all, into the soil and then the roots become channels along which the life-giving ingredients of the soil sustain the growth of the plant. Bagster’s ‘Englishman’s Greek New Testament’ renders 1 Tim. 6:10 thus “For a root of evils is the love of money”. In other words what Paul is saying is that the love of money, and trust in riches associated with it, is a channel whereby all kinds of evil characteristics are exhibited. Satan is the source of all evil and malignity; he manifests himself along many avenues through people, and the covetous love of money is one channel along which all kinds of evil flow.

If we can now put all of this together we should be able to state objectively what Paul is teaching. I think it would be wrong to make 1 Tim. 6:10 say that all evil stems from the love of money. There is a multitude of evidence in the Bible that Satan is the source of all sin and evil, and that there are many sins which people commit which have nothing whatever to do with money. On the other hand, I believe it is right to say that the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Those who have their hearts set on getting rich have an ambition which leads to temptations and snares; the desire to amass great wealth, to 'build greater barns' in which to lay up their treasures and thereby 'feed their souls' is a great risk. Such desires are temptations to commit other sins to gain their end: murder, theft, lying, etc. These sins cause men to sink into destruction and ruin. As Paul puts it, "they pierce themselves through with many sorrows" (literally, 'acute mental pains'), and they also "err from the faith" 1 Tim. 6:10.

The true riches

Having spoken about potentially destructive riches it would be most remiss of us not to look at the other side of the coin. We know that the Bible teaches that we should lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven and not on earth. I believe that these are the treasures in heaven that made Jesus rich as Paul said in his second letter to Corinth, 'For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich' 2 Cor. 8:9. We Christians know these riches to be expressed in salvation, for, 'there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved' Rom. 10:12,13. We should strive individually, to appreciate 'the riches of God's glory', and 'to be strengthened with might by his spirit in the inner man' Eph. 3:16 (read also to end of chapter). Wouldn't it be grand, also, if every community of Christians today could receive the words addressed to the church in Smyrna, 'I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty (but thou art rich) Rev. 2:9. I believe these to be the moral and spiritual riches that all should be aiming for.

Conclusion

Many of our problems hinge on the use and misuse of money. We can be rich in money or we can be rich in the things that money can buy. If we try to amass to ourselves an abundance of material things then in the Christian sense there would seem to be something wrong with our living, for, "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things he possesseth". In most of our lives the accumulation far outweighs the necessities, and the message of God is that having the necessities of life we shall be content. Anything further than this would seem to be a weight and a burden because we brought nothing into the world and we can certainly take nothing out. "There are no pockets in shrouds". Jesus taught, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and all these things (food, clothing, shelter) will be added to you" Matt. 6:33 Throughout history in the Church some have looked upon Godliness as a source of material gain (a means of making profit), and Paul taught Timothy that from such he should withdraw himself. However, as always, he gave the positive teaching when he said, "But Godliness with contentment is great gain" 1 Tim. 6:5,6. Yes, brethren and friends, the immeasurable and imperishable riches of God are held out to us: it would be the bitterest gall if we have neglected these and sought our treasure here upon earth. I pray that this may not be so for us.

(All questions please to, Brother Alf Marsden, 66 Mitchell Street, Newtown, Wigan Lancs).