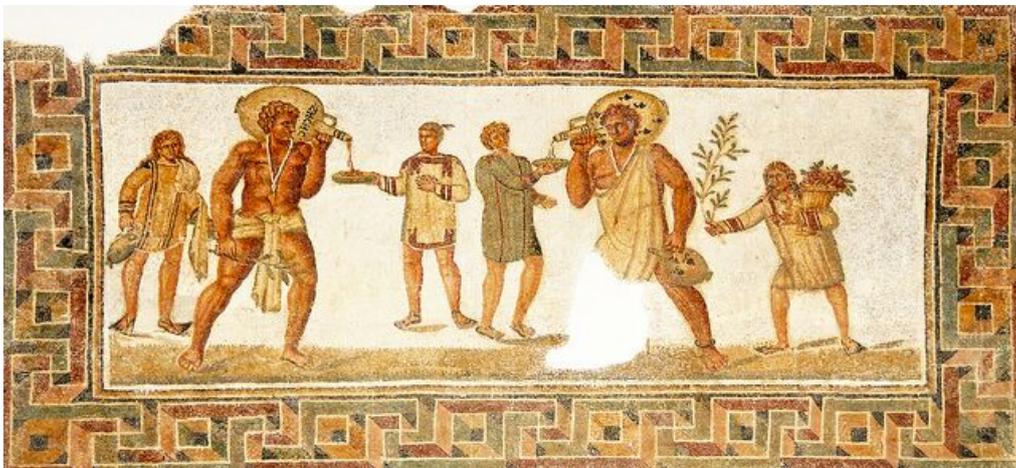


STUDY 8

CIRCUMSTANCES AND CONTENTMENT

OBJECTIVES

1. To describe how a believer's work contributes to the Christian witness of their local church.
2. To give the reasons why it is the Scriptures that informs the believer's moral code.
3. To be able to develop a God-honouring financial stewardship plan.
4. To demonstrate how your faithfulness to God is prioritised in the light of eternity.



BACKGROUND

In Paul's previous epistle to the Ephesians, he told Christian slave owners to treat their slaves fairly (Eph. 6:9). In writing to the Ephesians through Timothy this time, Paul apparently did not need to repeat this instruction to slave owners. But it appears that Christian slaves were taking liberties with their Christian masters which Paul needed to address as a matter of their Christian witness to their pagan community.

Objective 1 - To describe how a believer's work contributes to the Christian witness of their local church.

1. Some people have misunderstood Paul's exhortation to slaves in First Timothy 6:1 as an endorsement of slavery. But how do these other statements by Paul show that he did not endorse slavery?

1Cor. 7:21

Phm. 10-21

I have met several Christian businessmen who have said to me that they are now reluctant to employ Christians after finding that these employees had such a poor work-ethic. They would turn up for work late, take longer breaks than they were entitled to, and fail to fulfil their employment description.

2. How should Paul's words in First Timothy 6:2 inform a Christian employee especially if their employer is also a Christian?

3. What impact does a professing Christian employee, who does not fulfil their employment duties, have on the witness of their church they represent? Discuss.

Daniel was a part of the first wave of exiles to be sent to Babylon when Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem. In many respects he is a model employee.

4. How did Daniel gain the respect of his captors which eventually led to the Emperor being converted? (Note Dan. 5:11-12; 6:2-3).

Objective 2 - To give the reasons why it is the Scriptures that informs the believer's moral code.

Paul opened his epistle to Timothy by telling him that one of the pressing orders of business for his lieutenant was to correct false teaching that was not in accord with “sound doctrine” (‘doctrine’ is another word for ‘teaching’) (1Tim. 1:3). Paul now refers to this problem again as he closes his epistle.

5. Note First Timothy 6:3. What are the two sources of “sound teaching” for the believer?

It seems that the false teachers Paul had in mind who were infiltrating the church at Ephesus were twisting the Scriptures which led to them promoting ungodly behaviour. Notice how frequently Paul counters this in his closing chapter of his First Epistle to Timothy by referring to g _ _ _ _ _ s (1Tim. 6:5, 6, 11). Perhaps these false teachers were suggesting things like “We should not worship the *Holy Bible*. Instead we should worship the *Holy Spirit* and be led by Him instead!” Paul’s comments about them in First Timothy 6:4-5 seem to suggest that these false teachers were attempting to undermine the believers’ confidence in the Word of God.

6. How would Second Timothy 3:16-17 counter this idea?

One young caller to a Christian podcast recently used this line of reasoning - “We should not follow the Holy Bible because following the Holy Spirit is more reliable!” - to justify Christians having pre-marital sex. He reasoned that since the Holy Spirit leads us into joy and that pre-marital sex brought him joy, it must be the leading of the Holy Spirit. It was pointed out to him that the Holy Spirit who inspired the *Holy Bible* called pre-marital sex “fornication” (Mk. 7:21, NKJV) and “sexual immorality” (Mtt. 15:19; Acts 15:20; Rom. 13:13; 1Cor. 5:11; 6:13; 10:8; 2Cor. 12:21; Gal. 5:19; 1Thess. 4:3).

Objective 3 - To be able to develop a God-honouring financial stewardship plan.

It seems that these false teachers viewed Christians as soft financial targets. That is, some of the Ephesian believers were so soft-hearted toward the many itinerant Christian teachers who came to Ephesus that they were always ready to support them financially. It seems that these false teachers were prepared to claim to be “Christian” in order to take advantage of this Christian generosity. Paul says of them that they imagined “that godliness [was] a means of gain” (1Tim 6:5).

7. What word of caution does Paul have for the wealthy in First Timothy 6:17?

8. Despite the risks of being taken advantage of by false teachers, what does Paul encourage the wealthy to do with their wealth in First Timothy 6:18 and why vs. 19?

The pursuit of wealth can be a trap for a believer. It can rob them of their desire to serve God and take their focus off Christ and His mission (note 1Tim. 6:9-10). On the other hand, not being responsible financially can lead to being unable to provide either for your family or even for yourself in retirement. John Wesley often used to counsel believers to “*Earn as much as you can. Save as much as you can. Give as much as you can!*”

9. Today, one of the biggest financial dangers that people face is *attractive debt*. This makes the wisdom of *delayed gratification* seem to belong to ‘days gone by’. If you met someone who was about to get deep into attractive debt, how might First Timothy 6:6-8 give them pause for thought?

Objective 4 - To demonstrate how your faithfulness to God is prioritised in the light of eternity.

There are so many things that we can occupy our time with that may not be the best use of our time in the light of eternity. On the other hand, there are so many things that we could do that *seem* to be a waste of our time but are of great value in the light of eternity.

10. Read Matthew 25:33-40 and note the activities that might *seem* like a waste of time to some, but are highly commended by the Lord-

11. What activities does Paul commend to Timothy to devote his time to? (1Tim 6:11-12)

12. Does ‘living in the light of eternity’ mean that we should regard rest, recreation, hobbies, and sport, as poor uses of our time? Discuss.

Paul “charges” Timothy to fulfil his ministry and calling as he closes his epistle to him (1Tim. 6:13-16). We may never have an apostle spell out for us our “charge” but we can still be confident of God’s will for our lives as also given to Timothy in First Timothy 6:11-12.

13. Based on Romans 12:1-3, First Timothy 6:11-12, Matthew 25:33-40, what does living for Christ in the light of eternity look like for *you*?

APPLICATION

14. If you were the work colleague of another Christian who often arrived late for work and you heard the other staff complaining about his or her work performance, would you say anything to them as a fellow Christian? If so, what would you say?

15. You meet a new member at your club and discover that they are a believer. After chatting for a while they invite you to one of their church's Bible Studies in another church member's home. You agree to attend it that night and discover that the host and hostess are leaders in that church. But a couple of things trouble you that night. Firstly, it seems that although the Bible study is in the home of the of these leaders, they are not married. Secondly, during the Bible study one of the leaders stated that most of the Bible is now out-of-date. When you next see your friend at the club, they ask you how you enjoyed the Bible study. What would you say?

16. What are the three financial principles that every Christian should live by in your opinion?

17. What are two things you could do this coming week that may not win you public acclaim but will have eternal significance?
