

Homiletics Analysis: 1 Timothy 6

Content & Intent

This Text — Content

First Timothy 6 brings Paul's letter to its conclusion by addressing three interlocking groups through Timothy and driving toward a climactic final charge. The chapter opens with instructions for slaves (vv. 1–2), moves immediately into a prolonged and sharp polemic against false teachers characterized by greed and doctrinal pride (vv. 3–10), then pivots to a direct personal charge to Timothy himself as “man of God” (vv. 11–16), before returning once more to the wealthy within the congregation (vv. 17–19), and closing with a final solemn charge to Timothy to guard the deposit of sound teaching (vv. 20–21). Across all three sections — slaves, wealthy members, and Timothy — the animating contrast is the same: worldly gain versus godliness with contentment, the love of money versus the pursuit of righteousness, false doctrine versus the sound deposit of truth. The chapter does not meander through unrelated exhortations; it is structured around a theological center — the sufficiency and danger of rightly or wrongly oriented desire — and it closes by placing the full weight of that contrast on Timothy's shoulders as the faithful minister.

This Text — Intent

God is seeking to accomplish a diagnostic and reorienting work through this chapter: to expose the corrupting power of wealth-love and doctrinal pride, to give the congregation (and every subsequent reader) the categories to identify false teaching and misplaced desire when they appear, and to call the minister and the mature believer to a posture of contentment-grounded godliness in which eternal reward, not earthly gain, governs all investment. The passage is structured to leave the reader — especially the pastor or serious disciple — asking not “how much can I have?” but “what am I actually pursuing, and what will it cost me?” The closing charges to Timothy (vv. 11–16, 20–21) are not merely personal — they are the embodied answer to everything the chapter has diagnosed. Timothy is to be what the false teacher is not.

Subject Sentence: Godliness with contentment exposes and defeats the corrupting love of money and false doctrine.

Primary Claim: God is calling His people — and especially His ministers — to pursue godliness and contentment as the sufficient gain that the love of money falsely promises, and to guard this conviction as the very substance of faithful Christian life.

Interpretive Evaluation

The slave instructions (vv. 1–2) — social ethics or household code?

Some interpreters, particularly those operating from a social-justice hermeneutic, read these verses primarily as accommodation to an unjust social structure and use them either to relativize Pauline authority or to argue that the church should have done more to oppose slavery. Others (particularly certain Baptist and evangelical readings) reduce them to a general workplace-authority principle disconnected from their historical particularity. The Reformed reading neither sanitizes nor jettisons the passage. Paul is not endorsing slavery as an institution — 1 Corinthians 7:21 and Philemon make clear that Paul’s gospel destabilizes bondage wherever the Spirit moves — but he is addressing the practical discipleship of those currently in bondage. The instruction functions within a Christological logic: the behavior of slaves who are believers either adorns or blasphemes the name of God and the teaching (v. 1). This is the same logic as Titus 2:9–10. The application is not “accept unjust structures” but “your conduct within any structure is a testimony to the gospel’s transforming power.” The Reformed reading acknowledges the genuine difficulty of applying this text across cultures while insisting the underlying logic — that Christian behavior in every station serves the name of Christ — remains permanently normative.

The love of money (vv. 6–10) — “a root of all evil” or “a root of all kinds of evil”?

The famous verse 10 (“the love of money is a root of all evil” KJV vs. “a root of all kinds of evil” ESV/NIV) generates significant homiletical divergence. The KJV rendering has produced countless sermons claiming that money-love is the *singular* universal root of every conceivable evil — a claim the text itself does not support, and one Paul does not make. The Greek (*rhiza pantōn tōn kakōn*) most naturally reads as “a root of all kinds of evils” — i.e., an extraordinarily generative source of many different categories of moral failure, not the only possible root. The verse’s force is not diminished by this correction; if anything, it is sharpened. Paul is making an empirical claim about the destructive generativity of wealth-love, not a universal metaphysical claim about the structure of all evil. The Reformed reading insists on the accurate rendering both for exegetical fidelity and for the sake of the application: the idol of money is deadly not because it is uniquely cosmically foundational, but because it reaches into every corner of human life and corrupts it from the inside. This is a Keller-diagnostic insight: money-love is a particularly comprehensive idol because it touches security, identity, power, and comfort simultaneously.

The “man of God” charge (vv. 11–16) — is this for ministers only?

Some Wesleyan and holiness traditions read vv. 11–16 as a paradigmatic call to entire sanctification available to every believer — the “man of God” designation being generic and the charge therefore universally applicable without remainder. Pentecostal readings often place the emphasis on vv. 12’s “fight the good fight” as charismatic spiritual warfare.

The Reformed reading acknowledges that while the theological virtues listed in v. 11 are indeed called for in all believers (cf. 2 Tim. 2:22), the charge here is directed specifically to Timothy as minister. “Man of God” in the OT was a technical designation for prophets and covenant leaders (Moses, Elijah, Elisha — Deut. 33:1; 1 Kgs. 17:18; 2 Kgs. 4:7); in the Pastorals it carries the same freight of ministerial office and responsibility. The charge to “keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 14) is ministerial in its specificity. This does not exclude application to every serious disciple — the virtues in v. 11 are universally called for — but the primary address is to the faithful minister who must embody over against the false teacher all that the false teacher is not. Decontextualizing this section into a generic call to spiritual heroism loses the specific weight Paul places on ministerial fidelity.

Verses 17–19 — prosperity gospel appropriation

Perhaps no passage in the Pastorals has been more consistently mishandled than vv. 17–19 by prosperity-gospel interpreters, who read “they may take hold of that which is truly life” (v. 19) and the command to “be rich in good works” as confirmation that God intends material abundance for His people. This reading requires ignoring the entire thrust of vv. 6–10 and the fundamental distinction Paul draws between being “rich in this present age” (v. 17, addressed with solemn command *not* to be haughty or to hope in wealth’s uncertainty) and being “rich in good works” (v. 18) and thereby “storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future” (v. 19). The pattern is identical to Matthew 6:19–21 and Luke 12:15–21. Paul’s instruction to the wealthy is not to acquire more but to *leverage* present wealth for eternal account by generosity, thereby repositioning what they have from a foundation of false hope to a foundation of true life. The Reformed reading refutes the prosperity interpretation directly: the text explicitly commands the wealthy not to set their hope on riches (v. 17), which is the precise opposite of prosperity theology’s claim that God promises financial increase as a sign of His blessing.

Key Canonical Support

- **Matthew 6:19–24** — Jesus’ foundational teaching on storing up treasure in heaven versus earth, and the impossibility of serving both God and money; provides the dominical grounding for Paul’s entire argument in vv. 6–10 and 17–19.
- **Proverbs 30:7–9** — Agur’s prayer for neither poverty nor riches, lest he deny God or profane His name; the clearest OT parallel to Paul’s “godliness with contentment is great gain” — contentment as a spiritual posture, not a circumstance.
- **Philippians 4:11–13** — Paul’s personal testimony to having “learned contentment” in all states; establishes that contentment is a *learned* grace, not a natural disposition, and that its ground is Christ’s strengthening — not circumstances.

- **James 5:1–6** — The most severe NT indictment of wealth-hoarding and its eschatological consequences; corroborates Paul’s warning about the destructive potential of misplaced trust in riches, from a different canonical voice.
- **Hebrews 13:5** — “Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’”; establishes that the theological ground of contentment is not stoic self-sufficiency but covenant promise — God’s own presence as the sufficient possession.

Aim: To diagnose and displace the love of money and doctrinal pride as false sources of gain, and to call the reader to the godliness-with-contentment that alone constitutes sufficient and eternal wealth.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
6:1–2a	Instructions for enslaved believers: honor masters for the gospel’s sake; do not exploit believing masters but serve all the better	The logic is Christological: behavior adorns or blasphemes the teaching (v. 1). The Christian in any station is a witness.
6:2b	Transition charge: “Teach and urge these things”	Bridges household code instructions to the polemic that follows; Timothy is to pass these on.
6:3–5	False teacher profile: teaches different doctrine, obsessed with controversies, produces envy/dissension/slander; imagines godliness is a means of financial gain	“Different doctrine” (<i>heterodidaskaleō</i>) — teaching that does not agree with Jesus’ words and sound doctrine. The false teacher uses religion as a revenue model.
6:6–8	Positive counter-claim: godliness with contentment <i>is</i> great gain; we brought nothing into the world and can take nothing out; food and clothing are sufficient	This is the theological center. Paul is not dismissing wealth but redefining “gain.” Contentment is the posture; godliness is the substance.
6:9–10	Warning: those who desire to be rich fall into	<i>Boulomenoi ploutein</i> — those who <i>want</i> to be rich

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	temptation and snares; the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils; some have wandered from the faith in their craving	(not merely those who are). The danger is in the orientation of desire, not the possession of wealth.
6:11–12	Direct charge to Timothy: flee, pursue, fight, take hold; list of virtues — righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness	“Man of God” — ministerial designation. Six virtues contrast the six-pointed failure profile of the false teacher. “Fight” (<i>agōnizou</i>) — athletic/military contest.
6:13–16	Solemn charge grounded in God’s sovereignty and Christ’s faithful testimony before Pilate; keep the commandment unstained until Christ’s appearing; doxology	The charge is framed by two witnesses: God who gives life to all things, and Christ who witnessed the good confession. The doxology (vv. 15–16) is the highest Christological/Theocentric moment in the letter.
6:17–19	Instruction for the wealthy in the present age: do not be haughty or hope in uncertain riches; be rich in good works, generous, ready to share; store up treasure for the future	Complements vv. 9–10 but addresses those who <i>are</i> already wealthy (vs. those who <i>desire</i> to be). The wealthy are not condemned — they are redirected: use wealth as a lever for eternal account.
6:20–21	Final charge to Timothy: guard the deposit (<i>parathēkē</i>); avoid the godless chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge; grace be with you	<i>Parathēkē</i> — a banking/legal term: a trust entrusted to a guardian. The deposit is the sound teaching of the whole letter. “Falsely called knowledge” — possible reference to proto-Gnostic teaching.

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	6:1–2	The Gospel Witness of the Servant: Conduct in Every

Division	Verses	Label
2	6:3–5	Station Adorns or Blasphemes the Teaching The False Teacher Profile: Doctrine as Profit Motive
3	6:6–10	The Great Reversal: Godliness with Contentment Is the True Gain
4	6:11–16	The Man of God: Flee, Pursue, Fight, Keep — Until He Appears
5	6:17–19	The Wealthy Redirected: From False Hope to Eternal Account
6	6:20–21	Guard the Deposit: The Final Charge and Benediction

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

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Primary Claim: God is calling His people — and especially His ministers — to pursue godliness and contentment as the sufficient gain that the love of money falsely promises, and to guard this conviction as the very substance of faithful Christian life.

Applications (Five)

1. The love of money does not announce itself as idolatry — diagnose it by what it promises you. (*Mind/Belief*)

Paul's target in vv. 9–10 is not the wealthy as such but those who *desire* to be rich — whose imagination is shaped by what more money would finally provide. Most people in that condition do not think of themselves as greedy; they think of themselves as responsible, ambitious, or prudent. The idol of money is effective precisely because it disguises itself as security, love of family, or wise planning. The diagnostic question this passage demands is not “how much do I have?” but “what do I believe more money would finally give me?” Wherever that answer touches security, significance, control, or relief from anxiety, money has become a functional savior. Identify it. Name it. The passage insists that those who feed this desire are not heading toward security but toward ruin, destruction, and wandering from the faith.

2. Learn contentment as a discipline of faith, not a posture of resignation.
(Affections/Worship)

Paul's "godliness with contentment is great gain" (v. 6) is not the Stoic counsel to lower your expectations. The ground of contentment in Scripture is never "you don't need much" but "He has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5). Paul himself testifies in Philippians 4 that contentment is something he *learned* — not a personality trait or a circumstance but a grace acquired through practice and through the discovery that Christ's sufficiency holds under pressure. The application is not passive: cultivate contentment actively by redirecting your hope. What are you banking on? The text says food and clothing are sufficient (v. 8) — not because life cannot hold more, but because the one who has God has already received more than the world can provide or take away. Train your affections to find their satisfaction there.

3. Evaluate teachers and ministries by whether their message serves the gospel or funds their gain. (Mind/Belief)

Paul's profile of the false teacher in vv. 3–5 includes a specific diagnostic: he imagines that godliness is a means of financial gain. This is not merely a first-century problem. Every generation produces ministry contexts in which the health, wealth, and prosperity of the teacher functions as implicit proof of their message's validity — and in which the message itself is quietly shaped to produce the financial response that sustains that lifestyle. The test Paul applies is not sincerity but doctrinal fidelity: does the teacher's message agree with "the words of our Lord Jesus Christ" and "the teaching that accords with godliness" (v. 3)? Where doctrine is subordinated to audience comfort, and where the teacher's own enrichment is normalized as a ministry model, the profile of vv. 3–5 is present regardless of what the teacher says about his motives. Train yourself to recognize it.

4. If you have wealth, your present task is to make it count for eternity — not to secure more of it. (Will/Behavior)

Paul does not tell the wealthy in vv. 17–19 to give everything away (that is not what the text says), but he does tell them to do three specific things: not to be arrogant about it, not to hope in it, and to be generous and ready to share with it. The logic is investment logic: you are storing up treasure for yourselves as a good foundation for the future, so that you may take hold of that which is truly life (v. 19). Wealthy believers are called to a specific, concrete discipleship act — the active, intentional deployment of current resources for the sake of eternal account. This is not guilt-based redistribution; it is eschatologically motivated generosity. What are you doing with what you have right now that will matter when money no longer exists?

5. If you are in a position of teaching or ministry, guard the deposit — you have been entrusted with something that is not yours. (Will/Behavior)

The final charge in vv. 20–21 is addressed to Timothy personally, but the logic applies to every person entrusted with the communication of sound doctrine: pastor, elder, small

group leader, Sunday school teacher, parent. The word *parathēkē* — “deposit” — is a legal and financial term for a trust held in guardianship. You did not originate it. It belongs to the one who gave it. Your responsibility is to receive it intact, hold it faithfully, and transmit it without damage — and to refuse the “godless chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge” that would erode it. This is not intellectual heroism; it is stewardship. What are you doing to ensure that the sound doctrine you have received is being protected and passed on with the same fidelity with which it was given to you?

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: First Timothy 6 makes a foundational claim about the nature of *gain* — one of the most comprehensive categories in human experience. Paul does not argue merely that money is dangerous; he argues that the desire for gain is a spiritually diagnostic reality, exposing what we actually believe about where life comes from and where security is found. The chapter teaches that God is the one who “richly provides us with everything to enjoy” (v. 17), which means that provision and wealth are not inherently corrupt — they are gifts capable of being received rightly or wrongly depending on the posture of the recipient. The doxology of vv. 15–16 anchors everything: God alone is immortal, dwelling in unapproachable light, the blessed and only Sovereign — which means that every attempt to find in earthly wealth the security, significance, and sufficiency that belong to Him alone is not just foolish but theologically inverted. The passage thereby grounds contentment not in stoic detachment but in robust theological conviction about who God is and what He has provided in Christ.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: This chapter is a sustained application of the Reformed doctrine of Total Depravity as it operates in the specific domain of economics and ministry. The love of money is not merely a bad habit or a social problem — Paul presents it as a spiritual condition that distorts doctrine, destroys community, and leads people away from the faith (v. 10). The Reformed tradition has consistently insisted that the root problem of human sin is not behavioral but theological: we attribute to something other than God the capacity to secure, satisfy, and save us. First Timothy 6 provides the hermeneutical key for diagnosing how this theological displacement operates in the economic register. The chapter also reflects a strong Reformation principle in its treatment of vocation and station: slaves in vv. 1–2 are not told to wait for liberation before their conduct matters — their faithfulness in the present station is itself a gospel testimony. Luther’s two-kingdoms logic and Calvin’s doctrine of calling are both anticipated here. Finally, the closing charge to guard the *parathēkē* — the deposit of sound teaching — is the Pastoral Epistle equivalent of the Reformed principle of *semper reformanda*: the church is

always to be reforming *according to the word*, which requires that the word itself be received, guarded, and transmitted intact by those entrusted with it.

Main Takeaway

Godliness with contentment is the only gain that survives death — and everything this chapter exposes in false teachers, misoriented desire, and misplaced hope is the lie that something else will do. God is not calling you to want less; He is calling you to want rightly: to pursue righteousness, fight the good fight, lay hold of eternal life, and leverage everything you have for an account that does not expire. Guard what you have been given. Flee what you have been warned against. The appearing of Christ is coming, and at that moment the only question will be whether you held the true gain or chased the false one.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Preaching verse 10 as “money is the root of all evil” (KJV).** This is one of the most commonly misquoted verses in the New Testament. The text says the *love* of money — not money itself — is a root of *all kinds of* evils, not *the* root of *all* evil. Using the KJV rendering without correction leads to two errors: (1) it indicts wealth itself rather than wealth-desire, which contradicts vv. 17–19 where Paul addresses wealthy believers without condemning their wealth; and (2) it makes a universal metaphysical claim Paul does not make. Preach the actual verse. Its claim is strong enough without exaggerating it.
- **Reducing vv. 11–16 to a generic motivational charge for all Christians equally.** The “man of God” designation is not generic — it is ministerial. The entire passage is addressed to Timothy as the faithful minister who is to embody over against the false teacher all that the false teacher is not. Preaching this section as a universal call to spiritual heroism loses the specific weight Paul places on ministerial fidelity and the solemn grounding in God’s sovereignty and Christ’s testimony before Pilate. The virtues of v. 11 do apply broadly, but the specific charge of v. 14 — “keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ” — has its primary referent in the minister’s responsibility to the deposit of sound teaching.
- **Treating vv. 17–19 as prosperity-gospel validation.** The passage does not promise wealth to the generous; it commands the already-wealthy to deploy their wealth for eternal account. The explicit command is “do not set your hopes on the uncertainty of riches” (v. 17) — which is the precise opposite of a wealth-acquisition theology. A sermon that uses vv. 17–19 to suggest that generosity triggers a financial return cycle is misreading the passage at its structural level. Paul’s point is eschatological redirection, not a prosperity feedback loop.

- **Using vv. 1–2 to endorse unjust labor or social structures without pastoral qualification.** Paul’s point is about the testimony value of faithful Christian conduct in any situation — not an endorsement of slavery or of unjust employment arrangements. A sermon that simply says “respect your employer” from these verses without acknowledging the Christological logic underneath them (your conduct adorns or blasphemes the teaching) has reduced the passage to a workplace ethics lecture. Conversely, a sermon that uses these verses primarily to address the institution of slavery misses the discipleship point Paul is making to people currently navigating that institution.
- **Preaching vv. 3–10 without a specific, diagnostic application to contemporary ministry economics.** The false teacher profile is not merely a first-century curiosity — it is a recurring pattern in every generation of Christian ministry. The pitfall is preaching this section as a historical warning against ancient heretics rather than a present diagnostic for evaluating ministry models, celebrity teacher culture, and prosperity-adjacent preaching that is common in contemporary evangelical contexts. The congregation needs the application to land on something recognizable in their present experience, not only on something safely remote.
- **Ending the sermon on the doxology of vv. 15–16 without returning to the bookending charge of vv. 20–21.** The doxology is majestic and deserves full treatment — but it is not the letter’s final word. The letter ends with a charge: guard the deposit, avoid the false, receive grace. A sermon that closes with the doxology produces a sense of grand theological completion that may actually obscure the practical urgency of the final charge. Paul’s letter ends with accountability, not only with adoration. The preacher should not let aesthetic preference for a doxological close prevent the landing of the final command.