

He couldn't believe his eyes. He had to read the ATM receipt again. Did it really say over \$31,000 dollars was in his account? Highly unlikely the 18 year old Steven Fields of Atlanta would have that much, not to mention he couldn't recall any deposit he made. He didn't stop to think what happened though. He couldn't take his eyes off the amount. Focused on the windfall of money he did what people with money do, he spent it.

\$25,000 dollars in purchases later, at a car dealership, big box retailer, and fast food restaurant the bank realized they deposited the money in the wrong account. The money was for Steven Fields, just not the 18 year old Steven Fields. When the bank asked for the money back he couldn't because it was spent. So the bank charged him with theft. I don't know what kind of teenager Steven Fields was before becoming flush with cash. My guess is he never saw so much money and did something foolish. Instead of investigating where it came from he spent it. He had fun, and got in trouble. He was in trouble because he lost focus.

Writing to his younger friend and fellow pastor Timothy, Paul in the second lesson gives us our thought to ponder for our sermon series this week. With so many things calling out for attention and plenty of sinful behavior just beckoning us to partake the Christian needs encouragement. Paul provides that...

**People of God remain focused
In their treatment of money
In their fight of faith**

The pull of money is certainly real. Many have stockpiled stuff in this life. Focus went to what they could achieve, what they could gain, what they could all have. Happiness had to be attached to things and money. The more acquired, the happier they expected to be. But hopes of great gain were misplaced. **"Godliness with contentment is great gain."** For the Christian contentment isn't a lack of desire for things. It's being okay with what one has, considering that to be sufficient. It's seeing clothing and food necessary to survive as blessings from God. That's contentment. Combined with godliness, a God first mentality, that's great gain for a Christian.

The God first mentality is almost the first thing to go when getting rich is the passion, the drive, and sole focus for life. The love of money might pull further and further from God. It isn't helping that relationship. The love of money is a trap and eventually leads to eternal destruction. **"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."** The love of money gets people single minded and focused on something that does nothing for them eternally. Its self-inflicted wounds. The constant love of money has caused many a person, including some Christians, to wander away from their faith. Then like an animal stepping into a trap, once inside, boom. The trap closes and the Christian focused on the love of money is hurting and lost.

That verse from Timothy is often quoted, but more often misquoted. How many of you have heard that money is the root of all kinds of evil? There is a place in life for a genuine and legitimate concern for material wellbeing. But what starts out as a couple of spreadsheets to help with a budget suddenly becomes an obsession to make the numbers work and pursue money at all costs. What starts as working an extra shift or overtime to help get by with groceries or school supplies suddenly becomes overtime on weekends and evenings because the extra cash really is nice and feels like comfort. The possibility of getting rich has never been more of a reality. Send both spouses to work and make double the money. Always gain more so the spending spouse has enough to be happy. Don't you see the love of money is like a carrot dangling at the end of a stick? Just when you think you've achieved financial stability and wealth the stick moves. Focus changes to gaining the new objective. The heart falls into a pattern of getting focused on wealth that becomes everything we talk about and think about. If you want love to speak, your money can't be where your focus is.

Right focus comes from God alone. Think about this truth, **"For we brought nothing into this world, and we can take nothing out of it."** You weren't born with clothes on your back and money in your pocket. How is it you have them? You might first say you earned them. True enough, but those abilities to earn money at a job, where did those come from? The gifts you received in inheritance from a previous generation, who gave them the skills to earn what they passed on? Your heart is constantly torn between the sinful nature that says everything is yours and you deserve it because you earned it and the new person created by God that gives him glory for what he's done. I would have nothing, I deserve nothing, but each day by his grace God gives me clothing and food, he gives me shelter and all other blessings. Godliness sees the source of material blessings as God's grace. Through the Savior Jesus the root my heart focuses on for eternity is the love of Christ.

Everyday your sinful nature tries to pull you away from that. **"People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction."** God counters with something so different, so countercultural in the Savior. Jesus gives the right course, focus for our hearts. Why pursue more material things we probably don't need? With God given strength to avoid the foolish and harmful things of going after wealth we have more than we could ask for. We have eternal promises of a heavenly inheritance worth more than any money here on earth. To keep our focus on the heavenly riches God sometimes keeps us from earthly riches. I can't be distracted and lose focus on a boat if I don't have one. A bigger house with its extras in cleaning and repair can't distract me if I don't have it. God knows what will keep me focused best, the rest I don't have. All so people of God can keep focused on God in their treatment of money.

In a NASCAR race the goal is quite clear. Aim for the finish line and don't waste time on much else. Apparently drivers exert themselves during a NASCAR race, because afterwards they're tired, in need of fluids, and sweaty. A race is a struggle. But the goal is worth the struggle. For the Christian the struggle is to, **"Fight the good fight of the faith."** It's the fight faith always has to fight. The goal is nothing less than our salvation, our eternal life. It's a contest that is noble and good. From the moment a Christian is called and converted by the gospel they enter this fight. It's lifelong and it's hard. But the goal of heaven is worth it.

It can appear like this fight of faith may never end. Sometimes we question, what's it all for anyway? A huge struggle to remain focused on a fight for something we can't see right now and God isn't even giving us visible proof is real. Sounds like something we're not sure at times if we should even be focused on it. Becoming Christian means struggling in this fight, staying away from riches. But at least with wealth the struggle wouldn't feel so hard.

Paul didn't tell Timothy to fight his good fight of faith alone. **"Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called."** Timothy had been called. You are called too, by God himself. Christ made his good confession just before his death indicating the battle he faced. He was going to battle over our lives. Against Satan he faced temptation like we do, but never gave in. Satan could only watch as Jesus purposefully took every step necessary to get to the cross. It was a struggle carrying our sins. It was battle with Satan. One wrong step and the whole plan would be ruined. One lost focus, one side stepping pain, one avoidance of the struggle and it would mean eternal destruction for us. But Jesus stood before the world and made a confession of victory. Death would lose, he would win, and we win through him.

Christ's struggle makes your struggle worth it. When it seems you can't go on another step in the fight of faith, focus on Christ means the fight is already won. It's over and you're victorious in Jesus. Your struggle ends in victory. Then love speaks. You speak the love of God. You speak with the right focus in your hearts content in Christ's victory. Your fight of faith reminds you you're going to heaven, so living your faith means keeping that in mind and sharing it often. You're all in too. In a battle, a struggle, it isn't right to rest. The fight of faith is hard, but you strive to live what you say in worship, to live what you believe. You keep your focus on God in your fight of faith.

I suppose distraction would be easy with \$31,000 extra dollars in our bank accounts. But loss of focus in our pursuit of wealth or our fight of faith can be damaging to our faith. God works to keep us focused so we're enabled to speak with love. And that's what we do. We speak with love keeping focus on God and the victory he gives us through Jesus his Son.