

The Pillar

Contentment in a Materialistic World

1 Timothy 6:6-10

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⁶ But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. ⁷ For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. ⁸ If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. ⁹ But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many grief's. (*1 Timothy 6:6-10 ESV*)

This letter to Timothy is a challenging message, and Pastor Mark has done an excellent job in bringing that challenge to us on a weekly basis. This week we will look at a very real problem in the western world and particularly the good old USA. That problem is concerning money.

I went online (the source of all good information — or maybe not) and found this information on www.usdebtclock.org. As of last week, the US debt was \$15.6 trillion. Trillion is a number with 12 zeros. In more real numbers, it computes to about \$138,221 per taxpayer in the US. That is staggering. Personal debt is about the same. The number is \$15.9 trillion, and that equals about \$51,000 dollars of debt per citizen in the US. Our credit card debt is around \$800 billion. The numbers are unreal, but we realize they are real. So — what is the problem? Do we not have enough money? We have more than any nation ever. The amount of money is not the problem. The problems that cause these kinds of numbers are many faceted, but one of the main factors must be that we have not learned how to be content.

This morning the passage takes us to the question of contentment and how money can be a deterrent to true contentment. The sermon is entitled "Contentment in a Materialistic World" by contrasting contentment with money desires. The passage breaks down into two major sections— understanding how to be content and understanding the dangers of money.

I. Understanding how to be content (6:6-8)

1 Timothy 6:6-8 is a great introduction to the problem of money. Paul talks of contentment, which is something we all want and mankind has always desired. This short section gives three important elements to contentment. There may be other elements, but I am convinced that if we can get these three elements, we will experience contentment as God desires for his people.

Element #1 of Contentment: “Be truly godly” (6:6)

This verse is amazing in its simplicity but astounding in its profundity. In context, Paul had just commented that some of the people “puffed up with conceit” think of godliness (or religion, or piety) as a means of gain. In total contrast, Paul says that “there is great gain in godliness with contentment.” If one desires to be content, one must learn the reality of godliness. First, it is important to understand the meaning of contentment. In Paul’s world the Stoics loved this word, and to them it was that innate ability to be independent of external circumstances. It was a virtue of self-will and determination. Paul reworks the word and gives it a Christian definition where contentment comes to one who is totally dependent on God. What a delightful concept.

The question comes as to how to achieve that total dependence on God. For Paul it starts with true godliness. True godliness (in contrast to the false godliness of verse 5) is a recognition of God and who he is and what he is doing, and then it is to find ourselves connected to him. In the past year, I have become totally enamored with the overall story of the Bible. The Bible story line is rather simple. The triune God existed in eternity past and for his own glory chose to create all. He made the universe, and the express goal of that universe was to be a place where the glory of God would cover the earth like the waters cover the sea (my favorite verse in Habakkuk 2:14). God placed his image in creation as man and woman and commissioned them to guard his creation and to spread his glory around. You know the story. Man sinned and fell and was removed from the garden, and the Bible tells the rescue story of God redeeming his fallen creation. The pinnacle of the rescue story is God coming to earth in the God/man Jesus and dying for the sin of humanity and then rising as the beginning of a new world. As God fulfills his purpose in this present time, he has called his people to go to the entire world and spread his glory so that it covers the world as the water covers the sea. The last part of the story is already begun and will be completed when God returns to live with his people in a new heaven and earth with his resurrected people.

Contentment comes to those who are “godly,” meaning they are resting and working in the context of this God doing his mission. Those who have experienced the saving grace of God have all they need to be content and have confidence that God will finish up his work even in a mixed up world. The true treasure for the redeemed is Jesus the redeemer. So when it comes to money, the starting point of your budget must be God and his glory. God is the one who is first in priority in life—whether you are a child, single, young married, middle aged, elderly, or in any other category. The question of godliness is — Is He enough? Godliness realizes he is, and he is in control, and we can be content.

This godliness is great gain – true gain!

Element #2 of Contentment: Have an eternal perspective on life (6:7)

We live in a world of the “now is all that matters.” If the “now” is all that matters, then contentment will be impossible. It will be a never-ending rat race to run on a revolving wheel, going nowhere. Paul makes a kind of proverbial statement (maybe from Job) that “we brought nothing into this world and we cannot take anything out of the world.” Everyone knows that, but it does not always seem to affect us. We have two grandsons, as you may know, that have been on earth for two and

one year respectively. They brought nothing into this world for sure. We need to teach them that they “need” toys, soccer balls, etc. They learn quickly, and their contentment becomes more of a struggle as they “learn” what is supposed to be theirs. I also remember the time after my dad died, when we gathered his clothes from his closet and took them to Goodwill. He was a large man, and his clothes were so distinctive to him and too large for anyone else. It was sobering and sad to see that he took nothing with him, but neither will I.

We come to “buy” the idea that to be content we need more in this world. So we work harder and longer and seek more stuff for today and find that it may give temporary satisfaction, but it turns into the new norm. We need to get a proper view of the reality of eternity. All that we have is given to us and we are not made for this world but for the redeemed world to come. Living in the present only will lead to a discontent life. God offers so much more and we can be content with eternity’s values in view.

Element #3 of Contentment: Have a proper view of expectations (6:8)

The last thing Paul says about contentment (and he repeats the word in this verse) is that “if we have food and clothes with these we will be content.” I think he forgot to add “if we have an iPad.” What a tough statement to give to one who loves the American dream. We want a bunch, and our dream is that our kids will have even more. Paul argues that we need to be content with our minimal needs being met. The fact is that we live in a world where our minimum expectations are huge. We expect to get immediate help in the emergency room. We expect to get food immediately in the drive through. We expect health, wealth, prosperity. We are told we have the right to have wealth to meet all our expectations. Greed causes us to find that our “needs” are continually changing. Some of us have had great seasons when we had little and then have received more. Receiving more has moved our view of necessities and expectations. As a young pastor in the ‘80s, I did not have a cell phone, computer, voice mail or email. They did not exist, and I was content – sort of. Today, however, please do not take my computer away — I could not minister. It is a need and expectation. Have you ever known someone with few expectations and demands in life? They seem weird (certainly counter-cultural) but are also blessed to be content with the basic necessities. God promises to meet our needs (Philippians 4:19) and that contentment will come to those who learn to limit our expectations and to trust in Him.

Contentment – we all want it, and the formula for it is fairly simple, but it demands that people live counter-culturally to achieve it.

II. Understanding the dangers of money (6:9-10)

After his treatment on contentment, Paul sends some warning shots concerning the dangers of money. They are sobering and real and are not hard to believe. There are two warnings that are closely associated. First, he speaks of the desire to be rich, and then he subtly moves to the commitment to money with the word “love” of money. Money is not evil itself, but it carries potential baggage that can destroy many.

Warning #1: Desiring to be rich (6:9)

Paul addresses those who "desire to be rich." The Bible never argues that it is wrong to be rich per se. Here the desire to be rich is stated to create some real significant problems in life. When the goal of life is riches for the sake of riches then problems come. Paul sets up a scenario where this desire can lead to temptation or a lure. When we watch TV and see the great car, clothing item, destination vacation, or whatever, and we are tempted — "If only I had the money," then it is a snare or trap. The trap is set, the temptation is read, and the possibility is that we will get caught in the trap without even knowing it. The trap is so subtle that we do not immediately realize we are caught. When we get more, we set up the new limit for contentment, and we will go further, often without realizing it. This happens to those with or without money.

When the trap is sprung, and we are caught, we pull out the credit card and spend as if we were rich. We fall into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. We see examples of that everywhere. People are working many jobs for their fun money. Credit cards, with huge interest, are full, and minimum payments are being made. The monster has caught us in the trap, and we are plunged into destruction. We are not content and live in misery. That all comes from the "desire to be rich." We are not content!

Warning #2: Loving money (6:10)

The text now goes to one of the more familiar and abused verses in the Bible. Paul does not say "money is the root of all evil." The **love** of money is the (or "a") root of all kinds of evil. Love is the challenge. That is a word that is reserved for the primary relationships of life. Secondary realities are not loved. Love is a word for God and perhaps some other relationships but not for material possessions. The term "love of money" suggests that money becomes our mistress or our idol and replaces the role to be taken by God alone.

When I think of the love of money, my mind goes to the *Lord of the Rings*. One of the best known characters is a sinister person called Gollum. He was a "normal" person (for Tolkien) and became enamored with the ring. The ring represents anything that has power over us, and in this book, it has great power. It could represent the power of money that consumes people. Gollum, formerly Smeagol, became so obsessed that he withered to a shrunken creature that gave his life for his "precious." Money can do that to us and has done it to many strong people. Paul ends this section with the sober warning that through this craving for money, some have wandered away from the faith and have pierced (impaled) themselves with many pains. The danger of loving money is that you may spend eternity with that god and miss the God of true contentment.

Conclusion

So what do we do with this passage? Let me make some suggestions. My counsel is in two arenas:

1. Get your heart right. Confess your sin of not being content, and find your contentment in Him. He is enough.

- Are you content? Rate your contentment from 1-5 with 1 low and 5 high.
- If you are discontent, think of the three facets of contentment and start to pray that God will readjust your view of godliness, eternity, and expectations. That is a must. Pray for a renewed mind.
- If you struggle with an inordinate desire to be rich or with a love of money, repent and pray for a heart of repentance and a spirit of contentment.

2. Take actions to live out your contentment

- Do a budget today (or redo it) and start with the values of contentment. If you need help there are people in our church willing to help you with financial management (go to www.yourchurch.com/biblicalcounseling and fill out the form). Do it today!
- If you do not have enough money, review the elements of contentment and work hard to watch God provide your needs. You can still be a giver. Go to the tables of local outreach and find areas to help others.
- If you are rich – and most of us are – plan to find ways to give more to the kingdom. 1 Tim. 6:17 -19 speaks to us. Be ready to share. Our focus is Local Outreach this week – so find areas to share and see the gospel spread. That is glorious and provides for contentment.
- Finally – let us as a congregation commit to only one God and to find all we need in Him. Let's spur each other on to love and good works.

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