

Godliness with Contentment: 1 Timothy 6:3-8
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We're approaching the end of our study through the letter of 1 Timothy, and we come this morning to a passage that talks about false teaching and about money. The passage is 1 Timothy 6:3-8, and the thing that I want us to notice here is how our doctrine and our desires will produce very evident fruit in our lives, either for good or ill. If we have false *doctrine*, it will produce bad fruit in our lives and have a negative impact on those around us. Also, if we have ungodly *desires*, those desires will produce bad fruit. We'll see that more in verses 9-10, which we'll study next week. But we should notice that both false teaching and ungodly desires produce bad fruit, while sound teaching and godly desires produce good fruit.

As we go through these verses I'll first talk about false teaching and its fruit from verses 3-5, and then godliness and its fruit in verses 6-8. Paul tells Timothy, "Teach and urge these things," like he did in 4:11, which serves as a transition from one section to another as well as a reminder to Timothy that these instructions are not for him alone, but for the whole church.

False Teaching and Its Fruit (verses 3-5)

False teaching must have been a significant problem in the Ephesian church, and obviously something that Paul was passionate about confronting. He has already addressed this issue in chapter 1 and in chapter 4, and he returns to it again here. Verses 3-5 are one long conditional sentence in the Greek. "If . . . then." *If* verse 3 is true of anyone, and Paul knows that it is true of certain individuals at Ephesus, *then* verses 4-5 are true of them as well. And as we think about false teaching and its fruit, we can see that verse 3 describes the nature of the false teaching, and verses 4-5 describe the bad fruit that grows out of it.

Verse 3, "If anyone teaches a different doctrine," that is, different than what Paul taught, different than the apostolic teaching. This word for different doctrine only appears twice in the New Testament—in this verse, and earlier in this letter, in 1:3, where Paul told Timothy to "charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine." It reminds us of Galatians 1 and Paul's astonishment that they were turning to a different gospel. To turn away from the Gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed in His Word, through His apostles, is to embrace a different gospel and a different doctrine.

Paul explains further in the rest of verse 3 by adding, "and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and

the teaching that accords with godliness.” The sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ refer to the message that Jesus, Himself, preached, and was then taught by the apostles and preserved in the various letters that make up the New Testament. These are sound words, true words. And they come from Jesus Christ, Himself. To summarize the content of this message: It is the message that Jesus is one with the Father. He is God, the second Person of the Trinity. And He became a man and lived among us in this fallen world, yet He remained without sin. And then He went to the cross to sacrifice Himself for those who have sinned. And this message is such Good News because all those who acknowledge their sinfulness and repent of their sinful ways and trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins, will be saved. This is the only way to be saved, and there is nothing we can do to earn or deserve this salvation. It is a free gift to all who will humble themselves and receive it.

This is the true doctrine of God’s Word. These are the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ. And this sound doctrine produces a certain kind of fruit. It is “the teaching that accords with godliness” (end of verse 3). You see, doctrine matters. What you believe about God and about sin and about Christ and about faith, it makes a difference in the way you live your life. Many people want to downplay doctrine, downplay theology, downplay rigorous study of the Bible. But what we have to notice here is that there’s a critical link between sound doctrine and godly living. Solid, biblical teaching *accords with* godliness. By God’s grace, it will produce good spiritual fruit. In contrast, a different doctrine will produce bad fruit. And we’re going to see some of that bad fruit in verses 4-5. But first let me read to you some of the bad fruit that Paul lists in chapter 1. He cites several vices which are condemned by the law. He says in 1:9-11, “the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, *and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine*, in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.”

So, on the one hand there is sinful behavior that is contrary to sound doctrine. And on the other hand there is teaching that accords with godliness. This should impress upon us the absolute necessity of sound, biblical teaching. We can’t minimize the importance of rightly understanding God’s Word. We can’t ignore this. We can’t let other things get in the way of this. Because sound teaching will produce godly living, to the glory of God.

And false teaching will produce sinful behavior which will slander the Name of God.

Let's look at verses 4-5 now, and the sinful behavior that characterizes those who teach a different doctrine. First of all, he is puffed up with conceit. John MacArthur says, "When someone claims his teaching is superior to the Word of God, that is the epitome of arrogance." And he goes on to observe, "They may try to pass themselves off as humble, meek, and self-effacing, but it is the height of arrogance to affirm things contrary to the Word of God" (www.biblebb.com, sermon on 1 Timothy 6:3-5). The one who teaches a different doctrine and departs from the Gospel of Jesus Christ is necessarily puffed up with conceit, because they have rejected God's revelation and replaced it with a theology of their own making. It is the pride of thinking that I know better than God and refusing to humble myself under God's Word.

As we consider the pride that arises from false teaching, we should also realize that pride can too often be connected to *sound* teaching. It's not the same kind of connection, of course. The connection between false teaching and pride is logical and necessary. False teaching will always produce conceit, and it makes sense how that happens. But the connection between sound teaching and pride is illogical. Pride arises *in spite of* the teaching. It doesn't make sense. When we look at the glory of God and the wonder of the cross and the amazing news of the Gospel, it would seem impossible for anyone to become prideful in the face of these realities. Only when we understand our depravity does it begin to make sense. Our sinful pride can creep into even the most humbling of truths. As soon as we gain an insight into God's nature or God's glorious plan of salvation, we are tempted to feel conceited because of that knowledge. Insights that should inspire us to exalt God can be turned into a pedestal to exalt ourselves.

We are a church that cares very much about the truth. We love the truth. We want to think clearly and deeply about the truth, and this is a very good thing. But it can also make us prone to spiritual pride, intellectual pride, doctrinal pride. And this is not because of any deficiency in the truth, but a deficiency in our own hearts. So let's be on guard against this pride. Let us not be puffed up with conceit. May the truth about God revealed in His Word humble us, as it should.

Another characteristic of false teaching is an unhealthy craving for controversy. The next two statements in verse 4 are both participles, and they are contrasted with each other, which doesn't come across in this translation. More literally, it could read, "understanding nothing, but having an unhealthy (or sick) craving for controversy." This is a bad combination: ignorance and an attitude. There is a fundamental misunderstanding of

Gospel truth, and yet there is the relentless attempt to argue about minutia. This is why we need to continually keep the Gospel at the center and make sure that we're seeking to understand everything else in light of that. God forbid that we misunderstand the cross of Christ or ignore the cross of Christ, while we quarrel about the end times. That would be the kind of thing that Paul has in mind here. To ignore or deviate from the most central truths of Scripture, and then to fight about words.

What does this produce? Paul says it produces envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth. Here we see how divisive false teaching is. False teachers lead people astray in a thousand different directions, twisting this or that doctrine, emphasizing this or that detail of Scripture in the wrong way. And because of the conceit that is also necessarily tied to false teaching, all hell breaks loose. Not only are individuals fighting over words, but they're also fighting against one another, each trying to get the most attention and jealous of the attention others are getting. Slandering others, suspecting others of evil motives, constant friction. It's a horrible picture that Paul is painting here for us, and one that any church can fall into so easily.

This is why the instructions in this letter about elders are so crucial. Elders must be examined closely before they are appointed, and they must be held accountable, lest an elder in the church turn out to be a false teacher, and so that the elders can be united in their opposition of false teachers. It is also the responsibility of every member of this church first to protect our own hearts from embracing any kind of false teaching, and secondly to pray for our church and seek to protect our church from any kind of false teaching.

As I studied this verse and thought about the division caused by false teaching, I also thought about the fact that truth causes division as well. Jesus, Himself, said in Matthew 10:34, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." What does Jesus mean? He means there will be a fundamental divide between those who receive Him and those who reject Him, between truth and falsehood, between light and darkness. Jesus Christ is divisive in this way. He demands absolute allegiance, which creates a major divide between those who receive Him and those who reject Him. There's no middle ground. Either you are repenting of your sin, embracing Him as the only Lord and Savior, and submitting to His authority, or you are rejecting Him. So Jesus Christ causes division. The truth causes division. But this division is due to the fact that some love the truth and others hate the truth. And among those who love the truth, those who are saved, those who are

regenerate, there will be a growing unity around the truth. As we are sanctified, and as we put ourselves under God's Word and grow in our understanding of it, we will all be drawn closer to one another because we're drawing closer to the unified truth of the Bible.

False teaching will never produce that kind of unity. Instead it will lead people away from the truth in all different directions. It will distort the truth and breed confusion. And the arrogance that is involved will bring about all kinds of fighting.

Paul describes these individuals as depraved in mind and deprived of the truth. They have an unregenerate heart and mind. Their minds are still blinded by the god of this world, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:4. He also says in 2 Timothy 3:8 of the false teachers, "Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men *corrupted in mind* and disqualified regarding the faith." Having a depraved mind is not something that can be corrected by reading more books, or taking more classes, or getting more degrees. It is part of a person's bondage to sin before God regenerates them. And a depraved mind can latch onto the Bible and religion and spiritual things, but still not see the truth. This is why we find many very learned men and women who study the Bible in its original languages and are adept at theological discourse and teach at colleges and seminaries and write books, and yet the fact that they teach a different doctrine shows that they have a depraved mind and are deprived of the truth.

The last characteristic Paul mentions here is that the false teachers imagine that godliness is a means of gain. Christianity can be big business. Paul doesn't tell us exactly what was going on with the false teachers in Ephesus, but we can certainly see how this continues to be true in our own day. We know that many individuals, in various ways, have found godliness to be a means of financial gain. And many even make this the centerpiece of their teaching. Not only are they getting rich, but they'll tell you that you can get rich too if you just have enough faith (and send in a generous gift).

Paul knew how destructive it is to have teachers who profess to be teaching Christianity who are in it for the money. And Paul was careful to distinguish himself from these folks. He wrote in 2 Corinthians 2:17, "For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ." And he wrote in 1 Thessalonians 2:5, "For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness." And he told the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:33, "I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel." Because the love of money is so destructive,

and especially among church leaders, Paul had to be clear about the motives of his ministry. He was not in it for the money. The Christian faith is discredited, and Christ's Name is slandered, when individuals exploit it for financial gain. Therefore, to protect the church from this, Paul is clear to state that elders must not be lovers of money (3:3), and deacons must not be greedy for dishonest gain (3:8). The leaders of the church must never give the impression that the Christian faith is about worldly gain.

Godliness and Its Fruit (verses 6-8)

Now notice the transition to verses 6-8. Now we will look at godliness and its fruit. And notice the brilliant (and inspired!) response to worldly gain. Paul doesn't say, Godliness is *not* a means of gain. That might seem like the logical response to verse 5. The false teachers imagine that godliness is a means of gain, but we must never think that. Paul doesn't say that. Instead he steps back and points to the big picture of things and says in verse 6, "Now there is *great gain* in godliness with contentment." If you believe that, it will change your life. If you believe that godliness with contentment is great gain, far more beneficial and far more satisfying than money, then your whole outlook on money and life will be fundamentally different than the world's.

The important thing to see here is that the opposite of wanting material gain is not abandoning the desire for gain altogether. We don't say, I'm going to reject the desire for gain, so I'm just going to be miserable for Jesus. I don't want any gain. I'm just so committed to Jesus, I'm going to avoid any pleasure or benefit that may be offered to me. That would be to miss a very important point about the Christian life. Because while Christianity is not about *financial* gain, it is very much about gain. As this verse reveals to us, the opposite of wanting material gain is wanting true spiritual gain, gain that will last. Godliness with contentment is great gain, far greater than anything money can buy.

This reminds us of what Paul said to Timothy earlier in this letter, in 4:8, "while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come." And now he adds the word contentment. Godliness will produce contentment, and the person who is growing in godliness and growing in contentment will be far happier than the person who has all the money in the world and lacks godliness with contentment. If we think about Paul's difficult life, and the fact that he learned to be content in all circumstances, we realize that contentment is not dependent on circumstances. You might think, If I just had _____ (fill in the blank), then I would be content. That's not contentment, is it?

We call that discontentment. Always thinking about the one more thing that I need in order to be content. Or always thinking about the thing I would change about my current situation that would enable me to be content. But Paul was able to say in Philippians 4:11-13, “I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”

That’s real contentment, and it comes only through Christ, the one who gives us strength. Isn’t that an amazing thing? And isn’t that something that you want for your own life? To be content—truly content. Not craving one more thing, or ten thousand more things, or a different life, or a different job, or a different spouse, or a different family. The radical thing about true contentment is that it is not dependent on circumstances. And that is because this contentment is based on something that transcends our earthly circumstances. This contentment, which is the only real contentment to be found, comes from resting in the person and work of Jesus Christ. It comes from embracing Him and delighting in Him and believing that He is all we need and He is the only One who can satisfy our deepest desires—forever!

I want to exhort all of us to pursue this contentment. Let me ask you how much time do you spend running around trying to get all the things you think you need to be happy? Granted, there are necessities in life that we must work hard to provide for ourselves and our families. But what about all the extras? How much time do invest in trying to get the latest piece of technology, or the newest toy of whatever kind, or keeping up with the latest fad in clothing, or trying to plan the ultimate vacation. And then compare that to the amount of time you spend in God’s Word and in prayer getting your heart focused on the things that will really make you happy? Let’s test ourselves, brothers and sisters, and see if we are really pursuing godliness with contentment and hungering for the great gain that accompanies it, or if we are simply conforming ourselves to the desires and lifestyle of the world around us.

The world breeds discontentment. We are constantly bombarded by advertisements that tell us, You won’t be content until you buy this. That’s what marketing is mainly about—trying to create a felt need where there is no need. That’s how wealthy we are in America, even in severe economic times. The marketing experts vie for our extra cash and get us to buy things we don’t need, things that we use for a little while and then put away in the basement or the attic. And then a few years later we sell it at a yard sale, for fraction of the cost, to someone else who doesn’t

need it. I had an interesting conversation with our kids about this last week as we were eating breakfast. After I poured the milk into my cereal, Noah noticed that on the side of the milk carton was a picture of an Oreo cookie. A very clever marketing scheme, wouldn't you say? And Noah said, Why is there a cookie on the milk? So I explained how the people who make the cookies want our money, and so they want us to think that we really need to pay them our money to get some of those cookies, and they figure if they put up enough pictures of cookies, it will make us think that we really need them. But the thing is (and I really tried to stress this point) we don't need cookies! But oftentimes we think we need something just because we see a picture of it, just because we see an advertisement that creates discontentment in our hearts by making us feel like we need something that we don't have.

I encourage you to examine your own inward struggle with this, and try to identify some ways that you can avoid the influences that make you susceptible to discontentment. Maybe you need to decrease your media intake. Maybe you need to go to the mall less. Maybe you need to avoid certain individuals who always seem to be comparing people and comparing possessions and comparing accomplishments. Let's make sure that our focus is on Christ, and that we are diligent to keep other things out of the way that would distract us from that focus.

Verse 7 makes a very obvious, but very profound point, that shows the infinite difference between the "gain" of verse 5 and the "great gain" of verse 6. Some think that godliness is a means of gain because they can use religion to accumulate material wealth in this life. But any material wealth that we accumulate in this world will stay in this world after we die. We won't take any of it with us. "For we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world." It would be like going into a store empty-handed, with no money, and getting so excited about all the nice clothes you could try on and all the cool toys to play with and all the books to look at and furniture to admire, but at the end of the day you go home empty-handed. You take nothing in. You take nothing out. It puts things in perspective. What's so exciting about all the stuff when you can enjoy it only for a brief moment?

I remember a seminary professor and his wife who spoke at a marriage conference at Southern Seminary when Stacy and I were there. And he shared that when they were in seminary their budget was so tight that instead of buying cards for one another on birthdays or anniversaries, they would just go to a Hallmark store and show each other the cards they would buy for one another if they had the money. Those must have been pretty rough times.

But that's all this life is, really. We accumulate a bunch of stuff that we show to one another and enjoy for a moment, but we can't take any of it home. Therefore it's foolish to put our hope in these temporal things—these fleeting pleasures and possessions. Instead we should be content with the basic necessities. We should be content to have food and clothing, and grateful to God for providing these things.

Let's all do a heart check this morning, and try to discern how we're doing in the area of godliness with contentment. Can you see these virtues growing in your life, by God's grace? Or are you plagued by discontentment? Always restless, always grasping for something more, always angry and bitter over the things that escaped your grasp. Hope in Jesus Christ! He is more than enough for you. He is far better than anything our sinful hearts might desire. And God is sovereign! He is in control of everything we have and everything we don't have, and He is working all things together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). He has planned all of it for our ultimate good, if we belong to Him. Everything in life that is easy, and everything that is hard. Every desire that is fulfilled, and every desire that is left unfulfilled. It is all for the purpose of prying our fingers from the deadly and fleeting pleasures of this world and causing us to rely on Him, rest in Him, and delight in Him forever. So let's pursue the great gain that is found in godliness with contentment.