

Godliness with Contentment (Part II): 1 Timothy 6:6-10
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Last Sunday, as we studied 1 Timothy 6:3-8, we saw the bad fruit of false teaching and then, in contrast, the good fruit of godliness with contentment. And this morning I want to continue looking at this great reality of godliness with contentment and how to fight for that in our lives. And then we'll go on to verses 9-10 and see the destructive fruit of loving money.

Godliness with Contentment (verses 6-8)

We covered these verses last week, but I want to add a couple points of application before moving on to verses 9-10.

A. Poverty versus Contentment

First, I want to ask the question, What do these verses mean for the utterly destitute of the world? Verse 8 says, "But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content." What about those who do not have food or clothing or shelter? The word for clothing here refers to that which covers and probably means both clothing and shelter. So the two words, food and covering, summarize the necessities of life. To survive in this world we need food to sustain us and we need protection from the elements. So if someone is without food and without clothing or shelter, that is a crisis situation. And while one can still hope in Christ in the midst of a severe trial like that, in the face of starvation and exposure, but Paul in no way minimizes the serious predicament of those who find themselves in poverty. Therefore I think an application point that we can derive from this is the need to help those who are without food and clothing. In our abundance, we should be looking for ways to help those who have nothing. We can't expect the poor of the world to be content with their situation while we sit back and enjoy our comfortable lives here in America. John Stott makes the point that "the contentment Paul is writing about is not acquiescence in social injustice. On the contrary, we are called to combine personal contentment with the quest for justice, especially if it is justice for other people that we are fighting for" (*Guard the Truth: The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus*, 153). So these verses cannot be used to oppress or exploit the poor, reasoning that they should be content in their poverty. Neither should we be content with the knowledge that so much poverty exists in the world. Paul's point here is not to encourage poverty, but to encourage personal contentment and simplicity of lifestyle.

B. How to Fight for Contentment

The second question I want to ask is the very practical question of how to fight for contentment in our everyday lives. How do I fight to be content when circumstances are tempting me to feel discontent? Last week I read Paul's amazing statement of contentment in Philippians 4:11-13, where he said, "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." And maybe some of you have been asking yourselves, How does that happen? That sounds nice, but it's just not true to my experience. I can be content during the good times, but not during the hard times. So how do we fight for contentment?

The first thing we need to realize is that the root cause of discontentment is unbelief. In fact, all sin arises from unbelief. And the sin of discontentment comes from a lack of trust in God's goodness and God's sovereignty and God's sufficiency. We are not trusting God. We are not believing in Him, resting in His sovereign plans and hoping in His promises to us. We are discontent when we feel that our plans are better than God's plans, and our plans aren't working out. So we get frustrated and discouraged and depressed because things aren't going the way we want them to.

When we find ourselves in the grip of intense discontentment, we have a great opportunity to observe the idols of our hearts. We should ask ourselves, What is it that I feel like I need in order to be content, in order to be happy? More money, a bigger house, a different job. Whatever that thing is that by not having it makes me feel discontent, that thing has become an idol in my life. Ask yourself, What do I feel like I cannot live without? And in answering that question you have identified an idol in your heart. So when we're plagued by discontentment we need to really do some soul-searching and pray that God will reveal our sin to us so that we can repent of it and turn away from it. We need to realize that we have put something else in the place of God. And then we need to be spending regular time in God's Word and in prayer and in Bible study with others and sitting under the preaching of the Word so that we can be constantly reminded that the God of the Bible is the only God, and He is the only place we can find real contentment.

The only way we can even begin to fight discontentment is by acknowledging that our discontentment is sin and that it arises from unbelief. Then we can battle that unbelief by preaching to ourselves the truth that God is better than the idols we have set up in our hearts. God is more satisfying. God is more exciting. God

will bring us far more pleasure and joy than anything else ever could. And part of this message that we need to preach to ourselves is the truth that God is in control of all our circumstances, and that He is using them all for our good.

It's really the same way we need to respond to any trial or disappointment that we face. Job, for instance, faced the sudden loss of his possessions, and far more heart-breaking and tragic, the loss of his children. His response is remarkable. "Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. And he said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.'" (Job 1:20-21) In the midst of his grief, Job was able to worship the Lord, recognizing God's sovereignty and God's goodness. He found encouragement in the same truth that Paul points to in our passage. Job says, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return." Paul says in verse 7, "we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world." This is something we need to remind ourselves of that will put the trials of life and the disappointments of life in perspective. Whatever it is you feel like you're lacking right now, remember that when you entered this world you didn't have anything. And when you leave this world, you won't have anything either. So rather than griping about the things you're lacking, be grateful for the things you have.

Here are some ways to pray for your own soul and preach to your own soul when you find yourself tempted to discontentment. This is how you fight for contentment in God. You recognize the sinful desires of your heart, and your need for God's grace to change those desires, and you pray like the psalmist, "Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain!" (Psalm 119:36). And you pray, "Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days" (Psalm 90:14). And you recognize with Paul that godliness with contentment is *great* gain. And you cling to the promises of Hebrews 13:5-6, where we are commanded, "Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have [and then the command is grounded in this amazing promise], for [God] has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'" These are the weapons we have to fight discontentment and to shepherd our own hearts in the direction of true contentment.

Fighting for contentment is ultimately about constantly refocusing our attention on Christ. So we need to pray for God to grant us that focus. We need to be disciplined in Bible reading and Bible study and Bible memorization so that we can always have

the glories of Christ at the forefront of our minds. In the battle for godliness with contentment, I would encourage you to study the life of Christ, and stand in awe of who He is and what He has done for us. Some other practical suggestions would be to study the life of Paul, and observe God's grace in his life to have contentment in the midst of so many hardships. Read about Church history and the men and women down through the ages who have fought for contentment while undergoing various trials. Read about the persecuted church (Voice of the Martyrs, www.persecution.com). These kinds of things help to put our lives in perspective. I can look at my neighbor and feel bad that my lawn mower isn't as nice as his, or I don't have as many tools as he does. But then I think about the apostle Paul in chains because of the Gospel, or I think about Richard Wurmbrand, the Romanian pastor, who was tortured for Christ, and then all of a sudden the way I perceive my own situation changes quite a bit. Look for other ways, also, to turn your attention away from yourself. Pray for the unreached people groups of the world. Pray for the needs of other people. Look for ways to serve those in need. And finally, cultivate gratefulness in your heart. Thank God for the many blessings He has poured out on your life. It's difficult to wallow in discontentment when your heart is overflowing with gratitude. God's Word commands us in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

In these ways, and many more, we need to constantly refocus our minds and hearts on Christ. We need to remember His infinite worth and be grateful for what He has done for us on the cross and what He has provided for us in this life and the life to come. By doing these things we will battle the sin of discontentment in our hearts and pursue true peace and contentment in Christ.

The Destructive Fruit of Loving Money (verses 9-10)

As we move to verses 9-10 and look at the destructive fruit of loving money we find another very powerful weapon with which to fight covetousness and discontentment. In God's perfect wisdom, and in His profound goodness to us, He provides us in His Word with both the promise of reward for obedience and the threat of punishment for disobedience. This may sound harsh, but it is a significant means of grace to us to know not only the benefits of obedience, but to be warned of the consequences of disobedience. In verse 6 Paul stresses the great gain that is to be found in godliness with contentment. And now he stresses the great peril of covetousness. He explains the destructive fruit that springs forth from desiring riches.

The first thing to notice here is that you don't have to be rich in order to fall into this trap. No matter how much money or how little money a person has, the *desire* for riches can be a temptation. So the contrast that Paul is drawing here is not between the rich and the poor, but between covetousness and contentment. In verse 17 he's going to address the rich specifically, but here he is warning everyone against the danger of covetousness—the danger of always wanting more, coveting what others have, wanting to be rich.

Look at the vivid way he describes the tragedy of desiring riches. Verse 8, “But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.” It is falling into temptation, which reinforces the point that it is a sinful desire. It is a temptation we must resist and fight against relentlessly. It is also falling into a snare, and from the way Paul uses this word elsewhere in the pastoral letters (3:7; 2 Timothy 2:26), it seems clear that he is referring to a snare of the devil. The devil would love to entangle us in anything that will turn our affections away from God. And the love of money is a very subtle snare that traps so many. It's not as blatant as adultery or alcoholism or pornography, but it can creep into our hearts and grow into an all-consuming passion that crowds out every other passion. And that's all the devil cares about—that you are focused on things other than God. The devil doesn't care if you're on the street strung out on drugs, or if you're a wealthy, well-respected, moral person, as long as the passions of your heart are leading you toward something other than God. Matthew Henry says, “when the devil sees which way [a person's] lusts carry them, he will soon bait his hook accordingly” (Commentary on the Whole Bible, 1 Timothy 6:9).

The desire to be rich also involves falling into many senseless and harmful desires, and the harm of these desires is shown in the fact that it plunges people into ruin and destruction. The image is that of drowning. The money and material things that seemed to hold out life eventually bring death. The sparkling sea of worldly pleasures and possessions turns out to be a watery grave for those who are enticed by it.

It leads to ruin and destruction, which is eternal destruction. The desire to be rich will send you to hell, if you don't repent of it and fight against it. That's how serious this warning is, and that's why this warning should be a powerful motivation for us in the fight of faith. Paul is going to write in verse 12, “Fight the good fight of faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called . . .” So we want to be fighting for faith, which leads to eternal life, and killing unbelief, which leads to hell. This is the

battle of the Christian life, and it is a serious matter because heaven and hell are at stake. So let us repent of any covetousness in our hearts. Let's put those senseless and harmful desires to death, and take hold of eternal life. Look to the cross of Christ and cast yourself on His mercy. Ask Him to forgive you for your covetousness and discontentment and ask Him to help you see His infinite worth.

Verse 10 is a very well-known verse, although the precise meaning of it has often been misconstrued. Some of the older translations rendered it, "For the love of money is the root of all evil" (KJV and others). And many have taken it to mean that *money* is the root of all evil. But what Paul actually says is that the *love* of money is a root of all *kinds* of evils. The problem is not money itself, but the love of money, which is a problem for the poor and rich alike. And it is *a* root (not the sole root) of all *kinds* of evils (not all evil). The point is that when the love of money takes root in a person's life, it is going to produce all kinds of other evils as well. Many other sins will accompany it and grow out of it.

The person who loves money will ignore God. The person who loves money will esteem money and things above God, which is idolatry. Paul says that in Colossians 3:5. He says, "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry." The love of money may also lead a person to neglect his family in order to work more hours and earn more cash. As the love for money intensifies, a person's integrity may be compromised in order to make a few extra dollars here and save a few extra dollars there. Lying and cheating and taking advantage of others, all for the sake of building wealth. The love of money truly is a root of all kinds of evils.

The next sentence warns us again of the grave danger of loving money. "It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs." We encountered this same idea in chapter 1 of this letter, where Paul refers to those who "have made shipwreck of their faith." So what does it mean to wander away from the faith, to make shipwreck of the faith? Does it mean that a person can lose their salvation? No, it doesn't. When God truly regenerates a person's heart, He will cause that person to persevere in faith all the way to the end. God is powerful to do that, and He promises to do that. But the other thing we need to understand is that there are many who profess to be saved who are not really saved. They claim to have faith, but their hearts haven't been changed. Jesus makes this point very memorably in the parable of the sower. The seed, which is the Word of God, falls on different soils, which represent

different kinds of individuals and their response to the word. The seed that falls on the path, Satan immediately comes and takes away. The seed that falls on rocky ground is received with joy but then falls away when persecution comes. Then listen to what Jesus says about the third type of soil. Mark 4:18-19, “And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.” Then He says, “But those that are sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.” The good soil represents those who are truly born again and experience the real and lasting changes that result from that. The ground with thorns, though, represent those who may appear to make a start in the Christian faith. They may seem to believe, and give some outward indications of being regenerate. But then the deceitfulness of riches chokes out the word. Isn’t that an insightful phrase, “the deceitfulness of riches.” Riches promise pleasure and contentment and security, but it’s all lies. The allure of money is a lie from Satan. He wants to trap us in this snare and lead us to destruction. And those who go down that path will show that their profession of faith was nothing more than a profession. It was mere words. This becomes clear when a person wanders away from the faith. They show that they were never really saved.

These individuals pierce themselves with many pangs. They eventually realize the deceitfulness of riches. They discover the tragic reality that everything they built their lives on is just quicksand. Imagine your deathbed, looking back over your life and agonizing over the fact that you gave up your soul for material gain. You missed out on the most precious things of life in order to accumulate a pile of stuff that’s going to burn up. And most tragically, you are facing an eternity apart from God, in utter darkness and despair, because you made a god out of money.

Don’t wander from the faith. Don’t pierce yourself with these many pangs. Instead, fight the good fight of faith and take hold of eternal life. In closing I want to read several practical questions that will help us discern how well we are doing in our fight for contentment and our fight against covetousness and the love of money. Alistair Begg made several helpful points along these lines in a sermon on this text, and I’ll just turn them into questions for us to ponder as we each look into our own hearts and try to destroy the idol of money. Here are eight questions. 1) Does money consume my thoughts? 2) Do I get jealous when others are blessed financially? 3) Am I tempted to evaluate the status of my life in terms of what I have rather than who I am in Christ? 4) Am I neglecting my family in my pursuit of money? 5) Am I ignoring

the needs of others because I am so focused and dedicated to making more money? 6) Do I live in the paralyzing fear of losing my money? 7) Am I digging myself into the bondage of debt? Am I not content to live within the means of what God has provided, but instead feel like I have to live beyond my means in order to be satisfied? 8) Is God getting my leftovers rather than my firstfruits?

Let's examine our hearts and preach to our hearts so that we will not be destroyed by the deceitfulness of riches but enjoy the great gain of godliness with contentment.