

Devotion + Contentment = Great Gain

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[0 : 00] Alright, well we are almost at the end of our series through the New Testament letter of 1 Timothy. If you have your Bible with you, you can open it up to 1 Timothy chapter 6.

And we will have the words on the screen as well for you to follow along in case you don't have your Bible. Here in chapter 6, Paul touches on three significant issues.

First of all, he gives some instructions for slaves about how they should treat their masters. That's in the first two verses.

Then he moves on to giving Timothy some wisdom about false teachers and divisive people. That's in verse 3-5. And finally, we will only go as far as verse 10 today, he gives some wisdom concerning money and materialism.

Now each of these subjects could probably be its own sermon. And my first draft of this sermon was 45 minutes long, so the good news is I cut a fair amount out.

[1 : 05] We're going to move very quickly over the instructions to slaves. Linger a little longer on the words of wisdom concerning false teachers. And spend most of our time on the subject of money and materialism.

Let's start with these instructions to slaves. Let me read the passage for us. Paul writes, All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered.

Those who have believing masters should not show them disrespect just because they're fellow believers. Instead, they should serve them even better, because their masters are dear to them as fellow believers, and are devoted to the welfare of their slaves.

These are the things you are to teach and insist on. So this is a whole discussion and topic within the Bible that we're just going to summarize this morning. So what follows are a number of statements that we can see when we look at all that the scripture has to say about slavery.

Slavery was a normal part of the society and culture back in the first century, and even before that, all the way back through the history that is in the Bible.

[2 : 25] Many were not slaves because they had been kidnapped or stolen away from their families, but because they had sold themselves into slavery to pay off their debts.

The instructions of God in the Bible about slavery do not condone it or recommend it as a good thing. God's word does not call for the immediate release of all slaves by their owners, but it does contain the words that point towards the abolition of slavery as a good thing for all.

Christ instructs both Christian masters and slaves to treat one another well, with dignity, kindness, respect, and love.

This kind of conduct between Christian slaves and their masters honored Christ. This kind of conduct between Christian slaves and their masters upheld the established authority and laws of the day.

And this kind of conduct between Christian slaves and their masters protected the gospel message from slander. It allowed it to spread further and faster, meaning many more people saved from an even worse kind of slavery, which is slavery to sin and death.

[3 : 50] And finally, the way that God handles human slavery on earth, as we see all through the Bible, reveals his ability to bring good out of human evil.

And it highlights his transforming love and power over against man's tendency to hurt and abuse and take advantage of one another. That's all I'm going to say about it this morning.

Let's move on to the next section and consider Paul's wisdom for Timothy about divisive people and false teachers in the church. Verse 3.

If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, they are conceited and understand nothing.

They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions, and constant friction between people of corrupt mind who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

[5 : 06] So this is a long thought from Paul with a lot of stuff baked into it. What is Paul saying here? First of all, who is he talking about? He says, if anyone teaches otherwise.

So Paul's talking about people who are teaching, people who are advocating things, people that are seeking to influence others with their words.

And what defines these people? They're teaching otherwise. They're teaching contrary to the things that Paul's now saying to Timothy.

And if we're listening carefully to the flow of Paul's thought here, Paul's actually saying that the instruction that he has right now been giving to Timothy in the letter is the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me just read it one more time and see if you hear that. He says, These are the things you are to teach and insist on. If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, and we'll finish the thought in a moment.

[6 : 19] So Paul knows that Jesus Christ himself is speaking through him as he is writing this letter to Timothy. And essentially he's saying, Timothy, the way that people respond to these words is to be a litmus test for you.

People that rise up against these instructions, which come from Christ himself, they are, and then what follows is a list of things that they are.

Paul says, If anyone does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ, they are conceited. Conceited means exceedingly proud.

Probably the original word here also includes not just the idea of pride, but also the blindness and foolishness that goes with being exceedingly proud.

Pridefully deluded. He goes on, If anyone does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ, they understand nothing.

[7 : 25] So Christ's words are the very foundation of the truth. They are the words that the household of God should be built on, or that the life of a person should be built on.

And if we're rejecting that foundation, then it doesn't matter what we build on top of it. There's a problem. The way that Paul says it is very strong.

He says your understanding amounts to zero. I mean, what good is the whole framework and structure of religion that is built on what is false?

What at its core is not true is a lie. They understand nothing if they reject the clear instruction of Jesus, says Paul. They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words.

Some of the other translations bring this out a little stronger. Unhealthy interest is a very soft way of saying it or translating it. A little more accurate probably is that they have a sick craving for controversy or speculations.

[8 : 43] Disputes over words? They love that. This isn't just an unhealthy interest. These people are vocally teaching otherwise to Paul and to Timothy.

They're vocally disagreeing with the Lord Jesus' own apostle. And they're promoting controversies and speculations and deviating from the sound teaching, from the godly teaching.

They're listening to the words of Paul and then they're quibbling over them and twisting them. Well, he probably doesn't mean that. He probably means this. Paul says that the problem with controversies and speculations is that they result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions, and constant friction.

This is quite the list. What's the result or the fruit of these pridefully deluded people and the controversies and the speculations and the arguments that they're promoting?

It's causing envy to arise in the church. We heard in chapter 1 that they were making a big deal of genealogies, perhaps suggesting that some are superior to others because of their ancestry and causing envy to arise between the members of the church family.

[10 : 15] It's causing strife, conflict, rivalry between members of the church or factions within the church. The things that they're advocating are stirring up malicious talk.

Malicious talk includes things like slander, saying things that are untrue about other people, insults, or just disrespectful words that are spoken to lash out or to hurt.

These pridefully deluded people and the controversies that they're advocating are causing evil suspicions between people. It's leading members of the church to suspect things about one another that aren't true and to distrust one another.

And all this is causing constant friction. The sense here is that this is an ongoing thing. That relationships in the church are now characterized by irritation and arguing and fighting and tension. This is quite the impact that these teachers are having. How would you like to be a part of a church that's characterized by all these things?

[11 : 38] Envy. Conflict. Constant arguing. Insulting. Disrespect. Slander. Where everybody is suspicious about one another.

We get the sense here that there were real factions in the church. This is not a good thing. This is not a good testimony to the Lord Jesus.

The good news is that it's not everybody in the church who's getting sucked into this stuff. In verse 5 he seems to shift back to attributing these things to those people who are promoting them.

The bulk of this bad fruit is owing to the teachers themselves. And perhaps to their closest followers. They are the ones who have corrupt minds. Who are devoid of the truth.

And these are strong words. We get a sense that these false teachers and their most devoted followers maybe even weren't born again.

[12 : 49] Somehow they had gotten into those positions in the church. But now they're unresponsive to the instruction of the Lord Jesus himself that's coming through Paul.

And through Timothy. Now we don't know how bad it got in Ephesus before Paul wrote this letter. It was bad enough that right out of the gate in the first chapter Paul said command these men not to teach these things.

But we also notice that here in the passage he says if anyone responds in this way. And so it sounds like Paul has encountered a lot of these kinds of people before as he's been ministering to the already established churches traveling around.

So what are we to take from this? I think the Lord Jesus wants us to be wise to this today. It can happen in the local church. Praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord. It's not happening in our local church. But here's the danger that Timothy and Ephesus never faced. In our day and age a false teacher doesn't need to be in the local church.

[14 : 08] And yet can still influence and lead members of the church astray. A false teacher today doesn't even need to attend church. And yet there's the real potential for him to cause division and conflict and strife within a local church.

How many of you have ever fallen for clickbait on YouTube? Probably all of us have if we've figured out how to get on there and use it. And some of those YouTubers, some of those self-appointed discernment ministry people online, they know exactly the kinds of titles and exactly the kinds of questions and graphics to put on there to get people to click here and to watch and to listen and to read.

And if we get listening to these people who we don't really know, we can easily welcome the false teacher right into our home. And we can carry the false teacher around with us in our pocket and even get dinged when he has something new to say to us.

But is that person on the screen trustworthy? Here are some questions we can ask to evaluate and to discern. Questions to reflect on.

Is this online teacher pulling me back into the word of God and helping me see what's been here all along? What's the effect of this online teacher on me?

[15 : 43] How is this online teaching affecting the way that I relate to people in my church? Is it making me more like this verse 4?

Or is it whetting my appetite for controversy and speculation? Is it making me more contentious, more critical of others, more suspicious of others?

Or is this online teaching me helping me to love the people in my church more? Is it encouraging me to strive for peace with them, to forgive them as the Lord has forgiven me, to extend grace and compassion towards them?

Is this online teaching revealing my own pride? Is it humbling me? Is it giving me eyes to see the needs of others? These are some questions that we can ask.

I think if we look at the overall message of this wisdom that Paul gives to Timothy, the message is this. When it comes to false teachers, just like Jesus taught to his disciples about false prophets, you will know them by their fruit.

[17 : 01] At this point, Paul flows into a discussion of money and materialism. One of the hallmarks of these teachers is that they're greedy.

They're after money. They think, says Paul, that being devoted to God isn't the goal. It's a means. It's a means to what they really desire, which is financial gain. This is maybe another hint that, as we talked about last Sunday, that all of the elders in the church were receiving some form of financial compensation from the church, perhaps an honorarium of some sort.

And so it seems some of these men, which Paul has run across in his travels, are pretending to be devout in order to get themselves the honor, the gain, the profit that goes with the position in the church.

And so Paul now offers Timothy some wisdom about this particular ungodly desire and attitude of greed. He says, they think that godliness is a means to financial gain, but godliness with contentment is great gain.

[18 : 28] Being devoted to God, that's what godliness means, being devoted to God with contentment is great gain. These teachers have the opposite attitude, the opposite desires to what they should.

The true gain, the great gain that we should strive for is not financial or material. And it comes to us by being devoted to God while being content with what we have.

And now Paul adds some more to back this up, to explain why. Well, I'm missing the verse there. Verse 7. He says, for we brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out of it. Godliness with contentment is great gain for we brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out of it.

These are powerful words. We all started in this world with nothing. Think of that. completely naked. Completely naked. No possessions. No money.

[19 : 42] Completely dependent on others for everything. Which means that life in its greatest meaning is not about how much you have. This kind of entrance into the world reveals that we were made more for relationship than for ownership.

It points to the reality that life is not about who has the most. Paul says, we brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out of it when we die.

This is one of the most powerful truths that there is to fight against greed. Do you realize that the way we all started out in life with absolutely nothing is the way that we're going to end our time on this earth?

When it comes to money and when it comes to possessions, death separates us from everything that we have.

Our possessions, our money, they don't come with us when we die. And it's true for everyone. And so money and possessions really only matter for that span of life between birth and death.

[20 : 58] For us in Canada, that's an average of 80 years unless there's some kind of accident or tragedy. Here's another perspective to work into this. Most of the money that we have is earned.

Meaning that we put time and effort into working in order to get those dollars. We give a certain portion of our lives to doing certain jobs and tasks in exchange for that money.

And so that money represents a part of our time. It represents a piece of our life put in at work.

Which means that with most of the money that we spend, we're actually exchanging a piece of our lives for that thing that we're buying.

which means that if I spend lots of my money on stuff that I don't need for myself, for my comfort, for my pleasure, for my entertainment, for good looks, for status, if I spend lots of my money on things that I don't need, I'm trading lots of my life for things that I'm going to lose someday.

Things that I can't keep. This is a sobering thought. How much of our working lives have we already exchanged for things that we don't really need?

[22 : 30] Greed leads us to waste our lives. We put a lot of time and effort into working to earn money only to spend it on things that we don't need or that don't really matter.

Things that we can't keep. Contentment, on the other hand, is about being satisfied with having the basics.

Look what Paul says in verse 8. If we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. This is probably one of the hardest things for us to accept in our North American culture which is so deeply consumed and motivated by greed and by self-pleasure, self-entertainment.

Do we really need that thing that's on sale for Black Friday? Or do we just want a new one? A better one? A shinier one? A more comfortable one for a good price?

For many of us, we're so far beyond this simple statement in verse 8. If we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.

[23 : 49] I'm convicted. Are you? Paul goes on in verse 9. He says, Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.

It's hard to imagine how Paul could have stated this any more strongly. He just piles on the words, six words, which all together paint a picture of how the desire to get rich, to grow your money, to have more than you need is dangerous and deadly.

That desire leads you to fall into temptation, he says. And it's a trap. The more that we give into greed, the less free we are.

We become caught up in it and it's difficult to get out of it, almost like an addiction. We're so used to scratching that itch whenever we feel it, that we just can't stop.

We just can't bring ourselves to let that itch go unscratched, that desire to go unsatisfied. And it leads us to do foolish things, says Paul.

[25 : 07] Stupid things and things that are harmful. Now, of course, these things don't look or feel stupid or harmful at the outset.

We think, yes, having this thing, that'll make me happy, that'll make life better. Or working even more hours or getting a second or third job, or changing to this much higher paying job over here, it's gonna make everything better.

But giving into greed always comes with a cost. cost. It takes a toll. It exacts a price. It does damage and harm.

Whole families have blown apart because they spent without restraint on all kinds of things that they didn't need. Spending even more than they had, going deep into debt to have the bigger house, the nicer car, the holiday trailer, and the truck to go with it, and the expensive toys, and gadgets, and suddenly we're back at the beginning of this passage.

We've become slaves to our own stuff. And we have to work more, longer hours, two or three jobs to make the payments in all these things, or to cover the upkeep of all these things.

[26 : 31] And as we work more and longer, what happens to the relationships in our family? We see each other less and less, a toll is taken.

Fathers are absent. In some cases, both mother and father are absent. Husbands and wives don't see each other, don't spend that quality time together, and the little time that families have together is scarcely enough to have good, strong, healthy, loving relationships.

Throw a little conflict in here, which we all have from time to time, and it's a recipe for disaster. Families, marriages, are blown apart.

Paul isn't kidding here when he says that these desires do harm. Even more, he says, they plunge people into ruin and destruction.

Sometimes we look at the devastation and damage in people's lives and we see them spiraling out of control and maybe we're just wondering like, what's happening in that family?

[27 : 36] What's going on? How did they get there? Could it be that in some families and some people's lives there was a silent killer that they just kept making payments to, not realizing the damage it was doing until it was too late?

Greed. Discontentment. It's not just a bad thing. It's not just a sin that we need to repent of. It is that. It's a deadly thing, says Paul. It's an itch that if we keep scratching could completely undo our lives and destroy everything. And we're not just talking about excessive greed.

We're talking about desiring and going after more than the basics, as we heard Paul say in verse eight. Paul goes on in verse ten.

He says, 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.

[28 : 48] There's an important distinction in this verse. Paul doesn't say that money is evil. Money itself is not inherently evil.

It's just bills and coins that are used to exchange the value of service for goods or for other services. The currency is not evil.

Having money is not evil. And we're going to hear more about that in this chapter as we go on in the weeks ahead. But loving money, loving money is a root of all kinds of evil.

evil. And it's not just loving the money itself like I love to run my fingers through the bills and the coins. It's loving also the material things that money buys.

Or the security, the sense of peace or power that money gives when you have a lot of it piled up there. You may love a certain kind of material thing and have this desire to collect all of them or to have several of them even though you really only need one or maybe you don't even need any of them.

[30 : 01] So you put down the money again and again and again to get more and more and more of that thing that you love. That too is the love of money. For most of us, money is a means to an end.

We love what it enables us to do. And just in case we haven't caught the seriousness of this warning yet, Jesus adds in one last warning.

He says, some people eager for money have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. Not only is there the high price and the damage and the harm that it can do to you or to your family, but some people have left off of following Jesus because of that love.

they've wandered from the faith. Now we're not going to speculate about whether these people were born again or not or whether they repented and came back or not.

It doesn't say. All we know is that at one time they were here saying, I believe, and now they're gone. And what led them to leave?

[31 : 16] Paul says it was greed. It was the desire for other things that came in and choked out the word, making it unfruitful.

All of this calls for sober reflection and prayer. The good news is that Jesus died to cleanse us from all sin and from all guilt, from all greed, and from all the guilt that we have incurred through our lives, because of greed.

And so we run to the cross. It's there that we find complete forgiveness. But now I wonder if even on the other side of the cross, for those of us who believe, I wonder if some of these words expose for some of us maybe a sin in our lives that we've been blind to, that even as Christians we've been blind to, a pattern of desires or behaviors that we've been giving into.

Everybody else in our world around us is doing it. We see all the advertisements that promise happiness and pleasure, if we get more and have those things.

Could it be that some of our griefs and sorrows right now, some of the stresses in our lives right now actually trace back to this? choices in our lives that we've made about money or for money, for material things that we don't need, that we've gone after just out of the greediness of our hearts, in an effort to scratch that itch and just to make our lives more comfortable, more pleasurable.

[33 : 05] the good news is that however much we've blown it, however far down we've fallen, the Lord is gracious and compassionate. He's slow to anger, he's abounding in love, and so let's turn to him and let's repent, let's find freedom from the trap of greed, and forgiveness from the guilt of greed, and healing from the damage of greed.

Let's do that now together. Father in heaven, we are stirred deeply by these words, and convicted deeply.

We confess to you for every time that we have scratched that itch of greed, we ask for your cleansing and for your forgiveness.

Thank you that Jesus' blood atones for our sins and truly wipes our slates clean. Lord, we don't want to be slaves to anything or anyone but you.

We ask that you would teach us in the midst of this culture that we live in to be content with the basics as we live for you. May knowing you and having you and walking with you be the end goal of our lives and not just a means.

[34 : 36] We want you, Lord, to be our treasure and to have all the love of our hearts. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.