

'Greed, Godliness and Contentment'

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[0 : 00] Is it financial? A number in the bank account. The mortgage paid off. Enough in the super to never worry.! Is it relational? Kids who turned out well. A marriage that goes the distance. Is it professional?

! You built something, leaving a legacy. Or is it ministry related? A successful discipleship. Being the best Bible study leader. Most of us have some idea of what we would think would make us content.

Before I came to Christ, for a good chunk of my life, that was finding an easy job that I could climb up the ladder and eventually buy a house in Doncaster or Blackburn. The Australian dream. So I wonder what contentment might look like for you.

Well, Paul has something to say in our passage today, so let's dive in as we talk about godliness, greed and contentment. As Paul approaches his last section, he begins in verse 2b.

These are the things you are to teach and insist on. The command for Timothy to teach is repeated multiple times throughout this letter. The most recent in chapter 4 verse 11.

[1 : 12] To command and teach these things in reference to pointing out false teaching and correcting them by teaching the truth about God. So I think these things are in a similar vein of thought.

That is, the truth. The gospel about Jesus. And to that extent, the application of the truth, which we saw in the command of how we are to relate and honour one another.

Older men and women. Younger men and women. Widows, elders and slaves. But more importantly, Paul is raising the topic of false teachers again to draw attention to one aspect he's yet to raise.

Namely, their motivation of greed that he wants to guard Timothy and the church against. Now, since we've covered false teachers in the past, I'll try not to spend too much time on them today. But a helpful way of evaluating them is in light of chapter 4 verse 16. Which says, Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them.

[2 : 11] Because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers. It's to practice what you preach. To live out your words. And it's a way you can tell if someone is living their life according to the gospel of truth.

So, how do these false teachers measure up? Well, to point one in your outline. And let's read from verse 3. And see if you can pick up how Paul really feels. 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.

So, what does Paul think? Not good. And I think you could summarize Paul's thoughts on their life and doctrine by looking at the start of verse 4. In their life, they are conceited.

And in their doctrine, they understand nothing. Paul lays out that in these people's lives, their character, the way they live, isn't consistent with a true believer.

[3 : 36] Why? Because the outcome of their lives doesn't lead to godliness. It leads to more issues and troubles in the church. They're like pot stirrers who love causing drama.

Like those false teachers online who love to predict the end of the world and try to convince people to sell their homes. And then when it doesn't happen, they double down saying, oops, it's actually next year.

They think they know the truth. They think they have their doctrine right. But in actuality, they understand nothing.

And in verse 5, have been robbed of the truth. Now, if you remember at the beginning of 1 Timothy 1, Paul actually brings up a lot of these same topics. Like a good essay that has a well-structured intro and conclusion, Paul bookends with similar themes of teaching sound doctrine.

I've tried to visualize this, but you can see the topics are mirrored from here, chapter 1. Teaching sound doctrine, conceited, understanding nothing they teach, interest in controversies and quarrels, departing from the truth.

[4 : 45] Yeah, and departing from the truth. Paul takes a lot of time warning against false teachers. And so it's important. It's an important warning for us to heed today, too. So let me ask you, can you spot a false teacher?

There are many examples out there today, and we see many online. YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, wherever you doom scroll. So we must be careful to discern them by their life and doctrine.

Do they teach Christ faithfully? Do they live in a way that matches their message? And what fruit does their teaching produce? Christ-likeness or controversy, division and greed?

Now, if you notice in my comparison from chapter 6 to 1, it's a bit small there, sorry. But there's no direct comparison about wealth or greed. And as I mentioned earlier, I think that's because Paul is disclosing a new aspect of false teaching that he hasn't yet covered.

That is, they're motivated by greed, financial gain specifically. Here is their true motivation for teaching godliness, which Paul exposes, which is anything but godly.

[6 : 01] And it's one of the more telling signs of a false teacher, such as prosperity gospel teachers like Kenneth Copeland or Joel Osteen, who center their teaching around giving money to receive God's blessing back.

Their doctrine serves their greed and ignores the gospel doctrines of suffering and taking up your cross. And they're known for extravagant living at the cost of their followers.

Copeland owns three private jets and is quoted to say, he won't fly commercial because he doesn't want to be in a tube full of demons. You can look up at the interview. It's very interesting.

Life and doctrine. It reveals their true motivation and understanding of the gospel. And so now that Paul has outlined their motivation, he then turns to correct and warn against this mindset of godliness and greed, which is not just relevant for false teachers, but to everyone, including Timothy, and it extends to us today.

But before we read verse 6, I wonder, if you were given an opportunity to warn those who are using godliness as a means to financial gain, to those who are desiring to get rich, if you were to talk to that person and to give them a solution, I wonder what you might say.

[7 : 27] Well, let's see Paul's response. To point to in your outline, let's read from verse 6. So what's Paul's response to godliness and greed?

It's that godliness isn't the means to gain, but that godliness itself is the true gain for the Christian. Godliness shouldn't be used to gain wealth.

Godliness with contentment is true wealth. But why? Why is godliness with contentment great gain?

Well, to understand Paul's point, we must understand the foundation for the truth, which lies in looking at your beginning and your end.

When you're born, you bring nothing into this world. And when you die, you take nothing out. You return to the dust. We had an infant baptism today at 1030 St. John's.

Little Sophia Cher. If you went to Waverly, you might know their parents, Tim and Rach. But if you don't know them, that's fine. You can think of a cousin, a niece or a nephew, or any other baby in your life, and this will work.

[8 : 51] But when baby Sophia was born, she came into the world empty-handed. As cute as she is, she didn't come out holding cash, or with keys to a nice car, or a deed to a house, as much as Tim and Rach would have loved that.

She came with nothing, just as you and I did. And Lord willing, in 80 to 100 years' time, Sophia will one day leave this world the same way she came in.

No matter how much money sits in her superannuation, how many investment properties she owns, or how many achievements she accumulates, she won't be able to take any of that with her.

We bring nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out. So, what actually lasts? If wealth or possessions don't, and even life itself doesn't, what is the gain worth pursuing?

Well, Paul gives us this answer in 1 Timothy 1.16. But for that very reason, I was shown mercy, so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.

[10:10] Paul, who called himself the worst of sinners, was shown mercy. Not because he earned it, not because he had anything to bring, but so that Christ could display through him what immense patience and grace looks like.

And the result? Eternal life. A life that no bank account, no property investment, no earthly achievement could ever purchase or secure.

This is the great gain that makes all other gains pale in comparison. That a good God would send his son to take the punishment we rightly deserve.

That we now get to carry his spirit within us, a down payment, a foretaste of something so glorious it makes everything we can accumulate in this life look like dust.

Godliness is not just a virtue to be practiced. It is gain. Godliness is the treasure that begins now and never ends.

[11:18] Which is why we commended Sophia to the Lord today. More than academic success, more than financial success, more than anything in this world that it could offer, our prayer is that she would grow up trusting Christ.

Because the greatest inheritance she could ever possess is a faith that lasts forever. It is no wonder then that Paul continues in verse 8.

But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Contentment is not the absence of hardship, grief, anxiety, or the struggle against sin.

Nor is it a passive attitude that simply shrugs and says, it is what it is. But rather, contentment is the settled confidence that because God is for us in Christ, because our future is secure, and because our heavenly treasure cannot be taken away, that we can trust him that if he will take care of us in the next life, that he will surely take care of us in this life too.

We can be content with God's salvation for us. And you know that this is true doctrine because these are the words of Jesus himself.

[12:38] In Matthew 6, 31, he says, So do not worry, saying, What shall we eat? Or what shall we drink? Or what shall we wear? For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself.

Each day has enough trouble of its own. Even for those who don't know if they'll have food or clothing, they can be comforted that God has saved them for eternal life, and that if they seek the kingdom, God who knows them and who knows what they need will provide for them.

Of course, this doesn't mean that the church shouldn't help. In chapter 5, we heard about the practicalities of helping widows. And later in chapter 6, we'll hear about how we should be generous and have good deeds.

But the most important thing we have in this life is not food, clothing, or wealth, but our faith in Jesus, our godliness.

[13:52] And that's exactly the attitude we find in Job from our Old Testament reading. A man who had riches, herds of animals, shepherds, slaves, and yet those things were taken away in an instant, even his sons and daughters.

But look at Job's response. He tears his robe, shaves his head, and worships. How could Job do this? Well, we actually see the same words echoed from verse 7 in our passage in Job's mouth.

Godliness with contentment is great gain.

Godliness with contentment is great gain. But if that's true, then I wonder why we find ourselves so often discontent with what we already have.

Why does enough never feel like enough? And now it's not wrong to save money, to be ambitious, to study hard, buy a home, or to prepare for retirement. Those can all be good and wise things.

[15:05] But what happens when life doesn't go the way we hoped? When we don't get the grade we wanted? When the promotion doesn't come? The relationship doesn't work out?

The children we longed for don't come? The healing we prayed for doesn't arrive? Can we still be content? Could I still be content if at the end of my two-year apprenticeship God says, ministry isn't for me, go back to accounting?

Can we like Job say, the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, may the name of the Lord be praised. Yes.

We wholeheartedly can say yes because contentment is found in Christ. Because in Christ we have forgiveness. In Christ we have peace with God.

In Christ we have the spirit dwelling within us. In Christ we have eternal life. And if God has already given us his son, we can trust him with everything else in our lives.

[16:13] That is why godliness with contentment is such a great gain. Because when Christ is your treasure, you possess something that neither death nor loss can ever take away.

But not everyone responds this way. Not everyone sees Christ as their greatest gain. And that's why Paul gives us this final warning. So let's heed this as we read from verse 9.

Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and are trapped and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and 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.

Now, notice what Paul doesn't say. He doesn't say money itself is evil or that Christians can't have wealth. He's addressing something deeper.

[17:16] The desire to get rich. The love of money. It's discontentment with what God has already given that leads people into temptation, into poor decisions, into spiritual danger.

When money becomes the thing someone trusts to satisfy them, it becomes a trap. They're essentially saying that Christ isn't enough and that Christ can't satisfy their desires.

So they need something more. And while Paul speaks about money here, the issue is not limited to just finances. Although money is a very common avenue, discontentment shows up.

This is about desire itself. And so it's worth asking honestly, what is currently fueling your desires? Is it money?

Or godliness? Or maybe something else? Again, Paul's point isn't that desires are wrong in themselves, but that they can take the place of God in our hearts.

[18:22] Because the real question is, what is driving us underneath it all? Is it trust in God? Or is it a fear that says, I don't think God will provide for me?

That fear can shape us in subtle ways. For some, it looks like working more and more hours, not because of necessity, but because enough never feels like enough. For others, it shows up in hesitation to be generous, because we're worried that there won't be enough for us.

For some of you, it could look like chasing grades, internships, and career pathways at the expense of church life and Christian fellowship. It can look like consistently choosing work over gathering with God's people because extra income feels too important to miss.

Now, some of you genuinely do need to work on Sundays, and this is not about creating a hard and fast rule. The question is simply, what is fueling that desire?

What is fueling that decision? Is it godly contentment? Or is it discontentment and fear that God isn't enough? When the pursuit of gain begins to push godliness aside, that is exactly what Paul is warning about here.

[19:37] Now, I know that many of you are seeking to follow Christ faithfully. You're trying to live with godliness and contentment and choosing to forsake worldly gain for the sake of the kingdom.

And what a great gain you are choosing. Please continue to hold fast. God is faithful to keep his people and to sustain them in his grace. But many of us, including myself, we also know how easily our hearts are pulled into different directions.

We don't want to say that Christ isn't enough, but then come work pressures, study demands, family responsibilities, or health concerns. And without even noticing, a desire for different things slowly takes center stage.

But what a tragedy it would be to slowly trade godliness for things that won't last. A little less time with God's people. A little less prayer.

A little less attention to his word. What a tragedy it would be to end up like Judas, who stole money from Jesus and betrayed him for silver. Or like the rich young ruler who failed to follow Jesus because of how rich he was.

[20 : 50] Friends, don't love money. Don't love anything that would overtake our desires to love God with our whole hearts. Don't build your life around what will perish.

But instead, pursue the far greater game, godliness with contentment in Christ. Because that will never be a loss. That is a great game.

So here is the invitation. Lift your eyes to Jesus. Lift them beyond what is temporary and fix them on what is eternal. If you don't know Jesus personally, then what a great day today to start that journey.

Feel free to talk to myself or Mark or your friend who brought you. We'd love to share the good news of how we can be content in Christ. But if you find that your heart has drifted, the call today is simple.

Return. Return to God who welcomes with open arms. Return to joy in Christ. Return to the truth that godliness with contentment truly is the greatest gain you will ever have.

[21 : 59] Because anything else you build your life on will eventually fail you. But Christ will not. Let's pray. Dear Lord, thank you for giving us the greatest gift we could ever receive through your son.

We thank you that in your kindness and mercy, you are mindful of us and provide for what we need even in this life. Lord, help us to find true contentment in Christ that we may avoid the trap of loving money and other worldly things above you.

Help us to watch our doctrine and our lives to fuel ourselves with true godly contentment. We pray this through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.