

Contentment at Christmas¹

1 Timothy 6:6
December 4, 2016

My family and I enjoy watching the show Shark Tank. It's a show where young entrepreneurs gather to pitch their ideas to wealthy investors. Have you seen this show? It's so intriguing to see the new inventions and ideas for starting up new products and new companies. But some of the sharks, especially one who calls himself "Mr. Wonderful," seems to be ultimately consumed with just one passion: MONEY. He already has millions but it's clear that he wants millions more. He has more than enough but it's just not enough!



1 Timothy 6:10 begins, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil..." Not the root of ALL evil but a root of all KINDS of evil. Money, in and of itself, is not evil but loving it leads to evil. Rich people can fall in love with money but, then again, so can poor people and those who are in the middle class can end up loving money. So, it's important for each Christ-follower to ask herself and to ask himself: Am I in love with money? Well, I'm glad that you asked. Here's a little self-test: You may be in love with money if...²

- 1) ...You're more focused on how much money you can make at your job rather than on how well you are doing your work or how well you are glorifying God with your work.
- 2) ...Enough is never enough; if you never seem to find yourself in a place where you are satisfied with how much money you make or how many possessions you have.
- 3) ...You flaunt your possessions, finding pleasure in showing off what you wear, what you drive, or where you live.
- 4) ...You resent giving money to others; if it pains you to give, even when it's a worthy cause, because sharing is distasteful to you.
- 5) ...You sin to get more money: by lying on your taxes, cheating on your expense accounts, stealing from the cash drawer, or compromising your convictions in some way so that you can make more money.

The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. It causes problems in our personal lives, our marriages, and our families. It can cause trouble in churches, in our workplace, and in the community. The problem is not the money. We need money to survive and to thrive and to enjoy the good things God has provided for us.³ The problem comes in our attitude toward money.

1 Timothy 6:9-10 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. 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."

Christ-followers who love money with all of their heart, soul, mind, and strength are in terrible danger; the worst possible danger imaginable. And here's what it is: The love of money puts us in danger of wandering from our faith. This phrase "eager for money" is a causative participle. This means that the phrase "eager for money" is the cause of "wandered from the faith."⁴

¹ If parts of this sermon seem familiar, it's because I preached a similar message from 1 Timothy 6:6-10 on November 28, 2004.

² This quiz is based in part on pp. 10-11 of John MacArthur's Bible Study, *The Danger of Loving Money*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1989.

³ 1 Timothy 6:17b tells us that God "richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment."

⁴ *The Hobbit* story is a great illustration of this when they leave the path through Mirkwood Forest and get caught by giant spiders!

Can you picture that? You and I are walking in our Christian faith along the path that God has laid out for us. As we look to the side we see opportunities for money and possessions. We think to ourselves, "I going to stay on the path but it won't hurt to reach out to the edges a little and grab a few extras." We tell ourselves we'll just slow down a little, turn to the side, and lean out there a bit. But what happens is that we end up coming to a complete halt in our Christian life and service. We end up walking right off the path. We didn't intend to, but that's where we end up, off the narrow road, headed down the broad road that leads to destruction.⁵ We got distracted by our desire for more money and more possessions.

V. 10 tells us that this has already happened to some of the believers in Timothy's church. It's in the past tense: they "have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." So, beware! This could happen to you too and to me! The love of money puts us in danger of wandering from our faith. In vv. 11-12, Paul urges Timothy to flee from all this and to pursue godliness, to fight the good fight of faith.

1 Timothy 6:7-8 jerks us back to a proper perspective: "For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that." Godliness with Contentment teaches us to live in view of eternity. Living in view of eternity changes how we regard our temporary possessions. Our OT hero Job knew this. He was a righteous man who had lots of wealth, but he lost most of it in a single day. In Job 1:21 he says, "Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I will depart." We can't take anything with us.

Godliness with contentment is satisfied with what it needs and doesn't insist on what it wants. God understands that we have needs while we live here on earth. The Christian life does not require a vow of poverty from all of us. So, having food, clothing, and shelter are good things, things that we need during our earthly lives. The real challenge is being content once our NEEDS have been met. Learning to be genuinely satisfied when we don't have all that we WANT.

Let's join the Apostle Paul in his attitude, Philippians 4:11b-13, "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength."

Now, this doesn't mean that we shouldn't give our kids some Christmas gifts this year. Please don't go home and tell them Pastor Jerry said to just be content w/o presents. Don't throw me under the bus on this one! But, when you are sitting down together to unwrap your gifts with friends or family or co-workers, remember the gift of contentment. No matter what's behind the wrapping paper, find your ultimate, lasting satisfaction in God.

We are created to be satisfied in God. Only He can truly fulfill and satisfy the deepest longings of the human heart.

There's a story about a little boy who liked to play Monopoly with his grandma. Each time they would play she would always whomp him; she always won. Even if he managed to get Board Walk and Park Place, both with hotels, grandma somehow eventually managed to force him to mortgage all his properties by the end of the game. Grandma knew how to win at Monopoly but she also knew the lesson of 1 Timothy 6:7. After the game comes to an end, all of the houses and hotels and deeds of ownership will go back in the box. When the dice are rolled for the last time and all the money is added up, it all goes back in the box. It doesn't last.



⁵ See Matthew 7:13-14

One day I will die. However much or little I possess will be passed along to someone else. And when they die, it will get passed along again. Christ-followers who understand godliness with contentment recognize that we are simply temporary stewards of God's resources. God provides us a certain amount to live on during our few years on this earth. But, by the way I act, the way we act sometimes, you'd think we we're taking it with us. Or, to watch some of us Christians, you'd think that we weren't very sure about the promises of heaven. It's as if we are setting up our lives here on earth to be really good just in case heaven doesn't pan out in the end.

The fact is, often we aren't content even when all of our NEEDS are fully met. Consumerism makes contentment difficult. It teaches us that more things will make us more happy. We begin to define being content as that one day when we will finally have all the money and things we want.⁶ Then we will be content. Of course, that day never comes because we no sooner get all the things on our want list and we realize there were a few things we forgot to put on the list. Our sinful human nature always leaves us wanting more. We never experience that illusive "enough." Unless... we learn to live in view of eternity and allow God to bless us with the gift of contentment.

1 Timothy 6:6 reveals where true riches lie: "But godliness with contentment is great gain." It's significant to recognize that vv. 5-6 are a play on words contrasting "financial gain" and "great gain." Earlier in ch. 6, Paul warns Timothy about teachers in the church who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.⁷ It's a warning that even teachers and pastors in the church can be robbed of the truth. The distinguishing factor between "financial gain" and "great gain" is CONTENTMENT. Contentment is even better than financial gain; better than 1-day 10% jump in the Dow Jones Industrial Av. It's better than a 25% increase in our annual financial portfolio.

It's stunning to learn about how many lottery winners, professional athletes, and Hollywood stars end up financially broke just a few years after acquiring their wealth. Historically, rich financial gain has plunged many people into ruin and destruction. None the less, many of us still want to get rich. I try not to delude myself, as a pastor, into thinking that somehow I can wield the power of wealth better than others have done. Wow, can you imagine how awesome it would be for a pastor to receive a multi-million dollar inheritance? Just think of what all those millions of dollars would do for the ministry of a local church. Yeah, just think about it. Money is not the answer to all the world's problems. We would be wrong to let ourselves start thinking this way. We can't buy our way OUT of sin. In fact, today's text says much the opposite. We seem to buy our way IN to sin!

Greed is something we talked about briefly back in Ephesians 5:3: "But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people." Greed is improper for Christ-followers. It reveals a belief in Hedonism; that pursuing sensual pleasure and self-indulgence is the highest good and the proper goal of human life. A lifestyle of greed is exactly opposite of contentment. Contentment:⁸ is the state of being satisfied with our circumstances.⁹ If things are tight right now, but we have all that we really need, it's good to be content. If things are relatively comfortable, and we have a little more than we need, it's good to be content. If we are blessed with lots and lots of extra, it's good to be content. And, with any extra that we may have, rather than spending it on ourselves, 1 Timothy 6:18 commands us, "to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share." Godliness with contentment can be enjoyed by rich people and also by those who are poor, as well as those of us living in the middle class. It's not about the amount of money we have, it's about our

⁶ Rich Mullins has a great song about this called, "My One Thing" by Universal Music. You could check it out on YouTube.

⁷ But also see one chapter earlier, 1 Timothy 5:18, "...The worker deserves his wages" and 1 Cor. 9:14.

⁸ Same Greek word is used in 2 Cor. 9:8, "And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, **having all that you need**, you will abound in every good work."

⁹ This is not to say that the Bible supports laziness. The Bible calls us to work hard and to make money as we are able. We should strive to provide for our own needs for food and clothing and to take care of our own families or other financial responsibilities. See 1 Timothy 5:8. So this is not a lazy contentment but rather a godly contentment. See Also Ephesians 4:28.

attitude toward money. Therefore, all of us Christ-followers, need to intentionally and strategically commit ourselves to a different attitude; an attitude of contentment regardless of how rich or poor we may be or may become in the future. "A contented godliness produces a gain that money can't buy."¹⁰ If we can learn to be genuinely content with what God has given us, we have acquired GREAT GAIN.

But how can we achieve contentment? It can be very elusive. How do we get to that place of contentment and then stay there?¹¹ I have 5 suggestions:

1. Ask God to change our heart.
2. Acknowledge that God owns everything.
3. Cultivate a thankful heart.
4. Spend less than we make.
5. Give sacrificially to others.



V. 10 taught us that "The love of money is a root." It may be time for some of us to do some weeding; to pull up some roots. We may need to pay back anyone we have cheated out of paying. It might be time to reprioritize your personal budget to reflect godly contentment rather than your own foolish and harmful desires. Rather than being eager for money become eager to share! You may need to give some money away; discipline yourself with the habit of generosity. My mind flashes to the Scrooge blessing Tiny Tim or to the Grinch returning all the children's toys. Only, to be honest, I'm not sure that it's always joyful and fun. Giving up greed and learning to be generous may very well be difficult for some of us. You may find it relatively painful and challenging. But, you can be sure of this: God's Word teaches us that Godliness with CONTENTMENT is great gain. It's the best gift you could GET this Christmas. It's a gift that comes from God. Why not ask Him for it right now?

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¹⁰ MacArthur, p. 13.

¹¹ MacArthur, pp. 18-19