

It's good to be back with you after being gone last Sunday. I had flown into Florida on that Thursday night to spend Friday and Saturday with my dad for his 87th birthday. Then on Sunday I flew from Florida to Virginia to see our newly born fourth grandson Jack and to drive my wife – whom I had sorely missed for 2 ½ weeks – back home.

The other morning, I listened to last week's sermon on the prodigal son, which was powerful. I want to thank my fellow elder Noble Armstrong for serving God's word to us. Noble has also been teaching our Roc Solid students every other Wednesday, with Rich Christman teaching the alternating weeks. We're thankful for those who faithfully teach God's word through our various ministries at Webster Bible Church. And I love the fact that we had such a great attendance last Sunday. It shows that this church does not revolve around the pastor or any one personality but on the Word of God. With that in mind, I invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Timothy 6 (page 934, pew Bible). We'll be covering verses 3-10. This section is introduced at the end of verse 2, where Paul tells Timothy, "Teach and urge these things." Continuing in verse 3 he writes,

³ If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, ⁴ he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, ⁵ and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. ⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain, ⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

- 1 Timothy 6:3-10

A moment ago I mentioned that last week I was in Virginia to see my newborn grandson. As I was holding baby Jack, my other three grandchildren were vying for my attention. Ivy, who's eight, informed me that she could count to ten in Swahili, which she proceeded to do. Then six-year-old Ezra chimed in and said that he could do it too, which he did. Then, to my amazement, their three-year-old brother Jude also counted to ten in Swahili. I'm 55 years old and have learned many things over the course of my life, but I've never learned to count to ten in Swahili. It would be nice, but it's not necessary. I'm probably not going to be worse off for not learning it.

But the same cannot be said for contentment. That's something God wants all believers to learn for their benefit. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul said, "I have learned in

whatever situation I am to be content” (Phil. 4:11). Paul wrote this letter while in prison, so he wasn’t speaking out of school. The fact that Paul “*learned to be content*” indicates (1) it’s *not* automatic – not every Christian has learned it, and (2) it *is* attainable – possible for every Christian to learn it. In *The Power of Christian Contentment*, Andrew Davis writes,

Many Christians, it seems, go through their entire lives struggling, fuming, fretting, murmuring, fussing, arguing, and complaining against God and against their life circumstances. Sadly, I have proven on many occasions that it is possible to be a genuine Christian yet sinfully discontent.¹

At this point I wrote, “Me too” with a frown face in the margin of the book. One day last week I found myself complaining a lot. I was already feeling convicted about it the next morning when the Holy Spirit hammered it home through my Scripture reading that day. The first sentence I read was, “Soon the people began to complain ... and the LORD heard everything they said. Then the LORD’s anger blazed against them” (Num. 11:1 NLT).

As I read those words, I was filled with both comfort and conviction. Comfort because I know that God’s punishing anger, his condemning anger, against my sin absorbed by Christ when he bore my sin on the cross and took the punishment that I deserved. I was relieved – and even rejoiced – to know that “there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). How comforting is that! Yet I was also convicted that my Lord who has done so much for me had heard all of my complaining and was no doubt grieved and displeased by my attitude and words. Furthermore, while I am not subject to the Lord’s condemnation, I am subject to his discipline as his child. “God hates sin, not only because it dishonors him, but because it [also] damages me.”²

That’s what discontent does. It damages us. And sadly, some Christians never learn contentment. “However,” Andrew Davis is careful to note,

it is possible to learn it as Paul did, to reach the level of sanctification where we are actually content “in any and every circumstance.” That gives all of us on this pilgrimage of Christian grown a very real hope. If Paul can learn it, and if he is commending it to ... ordinary Christians ..., then we can learn it too.³

This portion of Paul’s letter to Timothy can help us in this regard. For here he talks about Christian contentment.

CHRISTIAN CONTENTMENT

1 Timothy 6:3-10

One of our weaknesses as sinful people is to pursue satisfaction in things apart from Christ. Not only are these desires unhelpful, but they’re also harmful. They are *toxic cravings* that kill our joy and keep us from true contentment, which is found in Christ alone. That’s the key takeaway from 1 Timothy 6:

¹ Andrew M. Davis, *The Power of Christian Contentment: Finding Deeper, Richer Christ-Centered Joy* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2019), 29.

² John Piper, “Is God Angry at Me When I Sin?” *Desiring God* [online]. Retrieved on 02 March 2024 from <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/is-god-angry-at-me-when-i-sin>.

³ Ibid.

***Forsake toxic cravings
and find true contentment in Christ.***

That's a bare bones statement, but we'll add meat to the bones as we digest this portion of Scripture together.

Paul begins by telling Timothy: "Teach and urge these things." Seven times throughout this letter, Paul employs the phrase "these things." His purpose in writing is so that Timothy will "know how one ought to behave in the household of God" (3:15). So, as Paul gives guidelines and instructions throughout the letter, he pauses here and there to remind Timothy that he is not to file "these things" away, but he is to "put these things before the brothers" (4:6). He is to "command and teach these things" (4:11cf. 5:7). He is to "practice these things" (4:15). He is to "teach and urge these things" (6:2). These verbs appear in the present tense, indicating that this is to be Timothy's constant practice. The combination these imperatives indicate that Timothy is not only to explain God's word to the people, but also to exhort them to apply its truth to their lives. Explanation without application is a half-baked sermon.

At the heart of all healthy teaching and living is Jesus Christ, for he is "the truth" (John 14:6). All Scripture is a testimony to him. Anything that deviates from Christ and draws people away from him is bad theology, the "teachings of demons" (4:1). That's why Paul warned against false teachers at the very outset of this letter, in the middle of his letter, and now again toward the end of his letter. False teaching never leads to true contentment, because the teaching itself is rooted in toxic cravings.

**Toxic Cravings
(vv. 3-5, 9-10)**

³ If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, ⁴ he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, ⁵ and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.

- 1 Timothy 6:3-5

In these few verses, Paul exposes two toxic cravings that characterize false teachers: controversy and money. Or, speaking more broadly, power and possessions. Paul introduces the craving for money at the end of verse 3 and expounds on it in verses 9-10.

After telling Timothy to "teach and urge these things," that is, the biblical teaching and instructions that Paul has laid out in this letter, Paul warns Timothy about the kind of person that teaches a "different doctrine." Paul defines this different doctrine as that which "does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 3). The word "sound" comes from a Greek word from which we get our English word "hygiene" – the science of preserving health. Jesus said, "The words I have spoken to you – they are full of the Spirit and life" (John 6:63). They are healthy and wholesome. They produce a good and godly life, eternal and abundant life.

But false teachers are spiritual quacks. They are arrogant and ignorant. Their words produce nothing but negative attitudes and divisions in the church. Like a gangrenous sore, false teaching infects those who are “depraved in mind and deprived of the truth.” Instead of producing a healthy church, heresy produces a sick one.

The *destructive message* of false teachers stems from a *defective mindset* because they “[imagine] that godliness is a means of gain” (v. 5b). The apostle Peter warned,

“And in their greed they will exploit you with false words.”

- 1 Peter 2:3

The bottom line for false teachers is, well, “the bottom line” – the *profit* that false *prophets* can make from God’s people. They’re in the ministry for the money, “imagining that godliness is a means of gain” (v. 5b). The false teachers in the first century were teaching an early version of the health-and-wealth gospel.⁴ The word “godliness” in verse 5 could be put in quotation marks. It wasn’t real godliness but godliness as these false teachers defined it. They taught that good morals – really their own set of rules that they set up by twisting the truth of Scripture – were the means to obtaining material blessing.

And as Paul had predicted in his farewell address to the Ephesians elders in Acts 20, their false teaching was gaining traction in the church, because they were drawing away disciples after themselves. Why was that the case? Because false teachers aren’t the only ones that crave power and possessions. Those who follow them do, too. In Paul’s second letter to Timothy, which we’ll be studying after Easter, Paul strongly urged him,

Preach the word of God. Be prepared, whether the time is favorable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching. For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear.

- 2 Timothy 4:2-3 NLT

I pray that Webster Bible Church will always “embrace God’s truth” rather than the world’s lies. Despite what false teachers claim, godliness is *not* the means to financial gain. Rather, godliness itself *is* the gain. That’s why Paul, before continuing his warning about the love of money, turns our attention to Christ, where true contentment is found.

True Contentment (vv. 6-8)

But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.

- 1 Tim. 6:6-8

⁴ Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*. Reformed Expository Commentary, NT edited by Daniel M. Doriani, series edited by Richard D. Phillips and Philip Graham Ryken (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 253.

We have already seen in our study of 1 Timothy that “godliness” is rooted in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It is “devotion to God which results in a life that is pleasing to him.”⁵ Philip Ryken in his commentary on this passage rightly states, “Such godliness is not a means to something else more valuable; it is supremely valuable all by itself.”⁶ Paul has already emphasized in chapter four that godliness “promis[es] benefits in this life and in the life to come” (1 Tim. 4:7 NLT). Devoting your life to Christ “is the ultimate investment because it yields eternal life.”⁷ With this in mind, the apostle Paul gives us three reasons why “godliness with contentment is great gain”:

1. **You can't take it with you.** “We brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world” (v. 7). When Job lost everything he had, he fell on the ground and worshiped God, saying, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I shall return. The Lord gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.’ In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong” (Job 1:21-22). The only reason Job was able to worship in the wake of such loss is that he treasured the Giver above the gifts. Job was the wealthiest man around, but he prized God above his possessions knowing that God is ultimate, things are not. Things are temporary, God is eternal.

“By faith, Moses ... chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward” (Heb. 11:24-26 NIV) – eternal life and joy in heaven!

God blessed King Solomon with wealth beyond measure, yet Solomon testified from his own experience,

Those who love money will never have enough. How meaningless to think that wealth brings true happiness! ... We all come to the end of our lives as naked and empty-handed as on the day we were born. We can't take our riches with us.

- Ecclesiastes 5:10,15 NLT

Recently, retired quarterback and seven-time Super Bowl champion Tom Brady signed a ten-year, \$375 million deal with Fox Sports. But at the end of his life, Tom Brady will die penniless just like you and me and everyone else. Then what? We don't have to guess because Scripture tells us: “each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment” (Heb. 9:27). That's a sobering thought. But it's followed by good news:

²⁷ And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment, ²⁸ so also Christ was offered once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him.

- Hebrews 9:27-28 NLT

⁵ Jerry Bridges, *The Practice of Godliness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1996), p. 16.

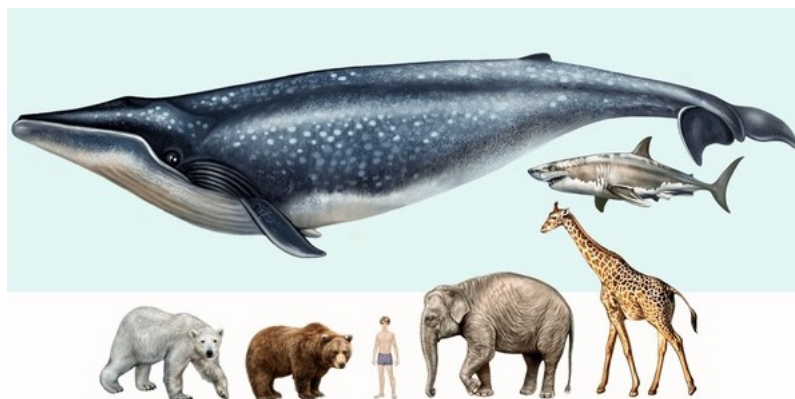
⁶ Ryken, 254.

⁷ Ibid.

“You can’t take it with you,” but Jesus will never leave you nor forsake you. That’s the first reason why godliness with contentment is great gain.

2. **What you have is already enough** – and probably more than enough. If you come into the world with nothing and leave with nothing, then what do you need in the meantime? *Not much.*⁸ That’s why Paul says, “But if we have food and clothing [*skepasma*, ‘covering’], with these we will be content” (1 Tim. 6:8). Why should we be content with just food and clothing? Because of the “sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 3), who said, “Don’t worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn’t life more than food and the body more than clothing?” (Matt. 6:25). Jesus went on to say that the reason we don’t need to worry is because the same God who feeds the birds and adorns the flowers of the field is the same God who provides for his children, and we are far more valuable to God than birds and flowers ... and even whales.

“Whales?” you say. Yes, whales. Consider this: “The largest mammal on earth is the blue whale.”⁹ [\[show pic\]](#)



It requires more than 1.5 million calories of food every day,¹⁰ so it is eating almost constantly. Its favorite food is krill (tiny shrimplike creatures), of which it can eat more than sixteen thousand pounds a day. Given that there may be as many as twelve thousand blue whales swimming in the oceans, God has a massive job to do in keeping them all fed. But he does it every single day effortlessly.¹¹

If God provides for the daily needs of the blue whale, don’t you think he can adequately provide for you? Our problem is that too often we’re not content with food and covering. We confuse our wants for needs. Doug Larson wrote, “What some people mistake for the high cost of living is really the cost of high living.”

⁸ *Ibid.*, 257.

⁹ Davis, *The Power of Christian Contentment*, 62.

¹⁰ To put that into perspective, the average human needs two to three thousand calories per day.

¹¹ Davis, 62.

We tend to think that to be content, we must increase our possessions to match our desires. We think, “If I had a better job, I’d be content.” “If I had a bigger house, I’d be content.” “If I had more money, I’d be content.” That’s our tendency, and that is how the world thinks. But Scripture says, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Rom. 12:2). We renew our minds with the word of God. For instance, the author of Hebrews exhorts believers,

Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

- Hebrews 13:5

“How can you be free from the love of money, and be content with what you have? Remember that you have God!”¹² That perspective radically adjusts our desires. In his classic book, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*, Jeremiah Burroughs emphasized that the Christian finds contentment not by matching his possessions with his desires, but by matching his desires with his possessions. It’s addition by subtraction. We keep our lives free from the love of money when we treasure Christ above all and match our desires to what God has already provided for us. Instead of saying, “If I only had that house, I’d be content,” we say, “God has given me this house, therefore I am content.” When God is my portion, then I’m content with whatever he gives me, because I know that he will never leave me or forsake me.

In Psalm 73, Asaph confessed to being envious of the wicked until he entered the house of God. Then he understood their destiny & realized what a fool he’d been. Then he prayed, “I still belong to you. You hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (vv. 23-26).

In verses 6-8, Paul gives us two reasons why “godliness with contentment is great gain.” The first reason is that “we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world” (v. 7). *You can’t take it with you*. That’s the first reason to be content. The second reason is that *what you have is already enough*. “If we have food and clothing, with these with these we will be content” (v. 8) because we already have Christ, and he is the greatest treasure of all.¹³

But there’s a third reason why “godliness with contentment is great gain,” and that is:

3. Discontent leads to destruction. In verses 9-11, Paul issues a strong warning:

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. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

- 1 Timothy 6:9-11

¹² Jacob Crouch, “Addition by Subtraction.” *Aliens and Pilgrims* [online]. Retrieved on 02 March 2024 from <https://jacobcrouch.wordpress.com/2024/02/29/addition-by-subtraction/>.

¹³ C. S. Lewis said, “He who has God and everything else has no more than he who has God only.”

Scripture says, “Keep your lives free from the love of money,” Why? Because “those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a [trap].” Materialism is deceptive. It’s like drinking seawater. The more you drink the thirstier you get. If you keep drinking it, you’ll die. Love for money has the same effect. It’s a toxic craving that will kill your soul.¹⁴

The desire to be rich is both deceptive and dangerous. It leads people into “senseless and harmful desires.” Love for money is a toxic craving that mushrooms into all sorts of sins: Idolatry, selfishness, covetousness, envy, dishonesty (e.g., tax return), cheating, stealing, lying, violence, and murder. People do that to obtain or maintain their wealth. Then there are all the sins people pursue by means of their money and possessions: pornography and other sexual sin, gluttony, drunkenness, neglecting those in need, oppressing the poor, exploiting the weak, and so on and so forth. One author writes, “In short, materialism is a breeding ground for thousands of other sins. Are you, Christian, foolish enough to think you are immune to these things?”¹⁵

Materialism is *deceptive, dangerous, and damning*. It “plunges people into ruin and destruction” (v. 11). The word “plunge” conveys the idea of sinking. It’s the same word used by Luke to describe the fishing boats that were sinking due to the abundance of fish (see Luke 5:7). A love for money and possessions will drown you eternally. Jesus declared unequivocally,

“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

- Jesus Christ
(Matthew 6:24)

That’s the truth, which is why Paul says in 1 Timothy 6:10, “It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs,” i.e., mental and emotional distress that leads to ultimate disaster. Don’t miss Paul’s point. Don’t miss Jesus’ point. “Heaven and hell are at stake in how we view our possessions.”¹⁶

I think that’s why Paul concludes this paragraph with a warning rather than a word of encouragement. He is sounding the alarm to those in the church who *profess* Christ but are not *content* with Christ, who are not *devoted* to Christ, but who are dominated toxic cravings. They are headed for hell and don’t even know it.

If the Holy Spirit is speaking to your heart right now saying, “This is warning is for you,” then there is only one sensible response: *Run!* “Run *from* the love of money and run *to* the love of God!”¹⁷ His love is better than money. His love is better than life. So, make Christ your greatest Treasure. Be content in him, and you will find that he is more than enough.

¹⁴ David Platt, *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary: 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, edited by David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 114.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 114-115.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*