

1 Timothy 6:6-10

I was, just this past week, sitting in CC's coffee house, *trying* to mind my own business, trying to get some reading and studying done when a group of three people came in and sat down at a table right next to where I was. After everyone had gotten a coffee, one of them began talking in a fairly loud, animated fashion. Now, it wasn't my intention to listen in on their conversation. However, the reality was that tuning their table out was not really an option - at least not completely - because the person who was doing most of the talking was simply too loud to be ignored.

And so, as there was nowhere else for me to go in the room, I decided to just stay where I was and tried to focus on what was in front of me - which was only half successful. But, even though I only caught bits and pieces of what was being said, it soon became pretty clear what was going on.

The man who was talking in such an animated way was trying to convince one of the other persons - an RN or LPN on a lunch break from the look of it - but he was trying to convince her to sign on with some sort of pyramid-structured, money making scheme where you are promised fabulous wealth for doing almost nothing - except signing up other people to do almost nothing with you. I'm sure you all know about these sorts of things.

Anyway, this man makes this long presentation which I caught bits and pieces of and then he finally gets to the end where he's going to try and get this woman to sign up. And so he asks her the typical, manipulative, trick question, "Can you think of any reason why you wouldn't want to take advantage of this wonderful opportunity right now?" Well, to her credit, she could think of some reasons and she started asking him questions, which went on for a little while.

Eventually, she got to the end of her questions - which the salesman had responded to with what must have *seemed* like good answers to her. But they really weren't good answers, they were just *slick* answers. At any rate, by this stage, she is just about ready for anything and so she asks what she needs to do and it is at this point that he tells her that "all" she has to do to get started is "invest" some of her own money into the "business" up front. And while I didn't catch the amount that she was supposed to invest, it must have been substantial since she suddenly became a little quieter and a lot more cautious.

And, of course, the whole time I'm sitting there, I'm dying to lean over and ruin this man's presentation and I'm thinking to myself, "Just get up, lady. Just get up, right now, and walk away. Don't listen to another word this man is saying." Well, thankfully, after a few minutes of intense pressure from this man, she managed to get away without signing anything. And, judging from the look on his face, I think he knew that he'd missed his opportunity.

And at the end of that whole encounter I opened up my Bible to the passage before us this morning, and read these words.

(Read 1 Timothy 6:6-10)

The little scene that had played itself out right beside me was a good illustration of some of the central ideas in this passage - ideas having to do with contentment, and the desire to be rich, and the dangers, temptations and traps, that go along with it. All of these things are addressed in the passage before us this morning and will be the focus of our study. Before we look at those things, however, let's pray together..... (pray)

Now, as those of you who have been with us will know, we are nearing the end of our study of Paul's First Letter to Timothy - a letter which has had as its main focus *promoting the good order and functioning of the church in Ephesus*. In this last main section of the letter, beginning with chapter 5, Paul has been addressing various groups on different matters related to that central theme. In the midst of addressing these different groups he is compelled to talk to Timothy, one more time, about the false teachers *and* their teaching - which had done so much to disrupt the congregation that Timothy was pastoring.

The verses immediately preceding -- verses 3-5 -- are where Paul began his final comments on this subject, talking there about the *message* and the *methods* and the *motivations* of the false teachers.

With regard to their *motivation*, it would seem that many of them - if you remember from our last study - were driven by a desire for material or financial gain. They had an ethic of greed. They were promoting a view that linked the pursuit of God with the acquisition of wealth. That was their motivation. And, you can be sure that if it was the motivation for what they were doing, then that motivation would have also found its way into their *message*. Indeed, this must have been one of the many things they were teaching that did not "agree with the sound instruction of Jesus Christ" - as Paul puts it in verse 3.

Well, in contrast to what these unhelpful teachers were promoting - godliness as a means to financial gain - In contrast to that, Paul counters by saying, in verse 6, that, in fact godliness IS a means to gain. They're right. But not *financial* gain. The gain that comes through the pursuit of godliness is not something that you can put into your wallet or purse. It is not something that increases the size of your bank account.

Paul says godliness is not something that leads you to financial prosperity. Rather, true godliness, as evidenced by one of its fruits: *contentment*, IS gain. To put it another way, *godliness is its own reward*. The thing that you get is not a "thing" at all. The reward is the person you become while you are pursuing God. It has nothing to do with money.

It is interesting, and I think revealing, to see the way that Paul qualifies the word “godliness” here, coupling it with the idea of *contentment*. Because, from what he says in the previous verses, it would seem that in all likelihood the false teachers would have been promoting their ideas and doctrines all under the very same banner of “godliness” that Paul and Timothy would have been using. They would have been promoting their own version or *per-version* of the truth as something that was spiritually legitimate.

But the version of “godliness” they were promoting was not godliness *with contentment* but rather a kind of “godliness” that was radically *discontent*, that was restless and dis-satisfied with the way things were - one that was impatient and self-oriented and demanding and proud. In short, it would have been an *alleged* form of godliness that was no godliness at all. A so-called godliness that was *without* contentment, and which would not rest until its covetous lust was satisfied.

Over against that sort of thing Paul says that the kind of godliness he is talking about - which is true godliness - is the kind that has contentment as one of its cardinal virtues. Now, what does Paul mean by the word “contentment” in vs 6? Well, for starters, we can get some clues from the verses which follow.

Verse 7, for example, makes a fairly indisputable statement - pointing out that we bring nothing with us into this world. We arrive completely naked, with no possessions or anything. And then, at the other end of life, we depart this world, as empty handed as we were when we first arrived. All of life is a journey that brings you back, in many ways, to right where you started. And all of the toys and trinkets you acquired along the way are just so much baggage that you lugged along with you, only to be told at the gate that you won't be allowed to bring any of it. That reality ought to have a shaping influence on how a person sees the world, and the things *of* this world.

So, in part, the contentedness that Paul has in view here is one that understands the truth of verse 7. It is under no illusions about the world and the fleeting, temporary nature of wealth and possessions. Further, as verse 8 points out, the kind of godly contentedness Paul is thinking of here understands the difference between *needs* and *wants* and can be satisfied with the basic things of life.

Now, if we look outside of this letter to another of Paul's writings - his letter to the Philippians, in chapter 4, we get some further insights into how Paul understood this whole concept of contentment,

(Read Philippians 4:10-13)

Now there is a great deal that could be said about these verses, and we're not going to say any of it, except for one thing: I want you to see the very *surprising* thing that Paul says at the end of verse 12. Do you see it? The surprising thing, to me, is this: while we expect Paul to say something about learning to be content when he is hungry or in want, what we *don't* expect to hear him say is that he has learned to be content when he is *well fed* and *living in plenty*. Right? Paul says he has learned to be content *in*

every circumstance - including really, really good circumstances.

Now, that's just surprising because we don't *normally* think of being well fed and having plenty of things as a situation which would *breed discontent*, do we? Indeed, those are the very circumstances which we typically imagine would *deliver* us from our discontent. If we could only be well fed all the time, if only we had all of life's extras, and plenty of money in the bank, etc., then we would be content. But Paul says no, it's not true. You could have a full stomach, and a full wallet, and still not know the first thing about contentment. You could still be a very discontented person.

Why is that the case? Because discontentment is not a function of what we possess, but rather, is a function of what we cherish. The determining factor in contentment is whether Christ alone is enough for us. As long as Christ is not enough for us, as long as we have set our heart's affections on other things, and we imagine that we must have them or we cannot be fulfilled - as long as we think that way contentment will elude us.

One of the Puritan writers puts it like this, "It is like a man being hungry, and then to satisfy his craving stomach, he should gape and hold open his mouth to take in the wind, and then should think that the reason why he is not satisfied is because he has not yet gotten enough of the wind.

No, the reason he is not satisfied is because the wind will never satisfy an empty stomach. He is trying to get full with that which will not fill. That's right isn't it? That's the "secret" of contentment that Paul learned. That is why Paul says in verse 13, of Philippians 4, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength". That's why Paul says, in vs 8 of 1st Timothy 6, "if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that". Because the contentment that accompanies true godliness has set its affections on Christ and sees Him as the greatest of all Treasures and does not look or even want to get filled up by things that do not fill, that cannot fill.

And so, in contrast to the false teachers' perspective - that godliness is a means to financial gain - Paul says that godliness with contentment is *itself* great gain, irrespective of any material rewards. And the reason is because the contentment that accompanies true godliness is seeking to be filled by that which *actually* fills - Christ - and is indifferent toward the things that do not fill, which is basically everything else. It can take them, or leave them, but is not in any way enslaved to them, or to the pursuit of them.

Which leads us to consider the other reason why godliness with contentment is great gain. And that reason is found as we look at verses 9 and 10, where Paul writes,

"People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs..."

Godliness *with contentment* is great gain, not only for reasons we have already seen, but also because any other version of “godliness” - like that being promoted by the false teachers - in the end, leads a person down the path of ruin and great loss. Which is a huge irony, isn't it? The thing that advertises itself as a means to financial gain, leads to the ultimate LOSS. But this is the very thing the false teachers were promoting. They were saying things that nurtured the *discontent* of people and fed their dis-satisfaction and their natural desire to value and pursue riches - and as a result placed them in a precarious situation.

Paul's words here describe a progression - a chain of events - that starts over here with this desire to be rich and ends, over here, with ruin and destruction and people wandering away from the faith, and people piercing themselves with many griefs.

Now, a person might wonder, “How does that all work out?” Well, first of all, Paul says that people who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap. But what sorts of things might Paul be talking about here? And the answer is, potentially, all kinds of things. And the reason for that has to do with the nature of what is going on.

You see, if the desire to get rich is a person's driving motivation, then, in effect, that becomes an *idol*, a center of gravity. And here's the funny thing about idols: they're very hungry things. Idols demand to be fed. They require a sacrifice, and an on-going one at that. And so if, in the course of pursuing riches, there comes a moment where, say, being scrupulously honest stands in the way - then the temptation at that point will be to sacrifice honesty at the feet of your idol. Or, if in the course of pursuing riches, marital and family responsibilities stand in the way - then the temptation at that point will be to sacrifice marriage and family at the feet of the idol. Do you see how that works? Idols are hungry. They must be fed. They require regular sacrifices. Sound familiar?

Now the particulars of how those temptations would have worked themselves out in Paul's day might be different in some ways to how they would work themselves out in our own day - but the underlying dynamics are the same in every age. The desire for riches leads people into temptation and into Satan's trap - into situations where the person is invited, on a regular basis, to sacrifice personal integrity and to engage in all kinds of moral compromise - and then take and lay these things - like so many sacrifices - at the feet of your idol.

And then, as if that is not enough, the progression that Paul describes here goes further. The original desire - to get rich - that gives birth to other desires, that idol breeds other idols, which leads to further compromise and the need for more sacrifices. For example, the person who has pursued riches for some time may, after accumulating a big enough pile of money - decide to use his acquired wealth to nurture a desire for status and power - and so lead him to go about trying to obtain the best friends and the best influence that money can buy.

Or, in terms of our own day and age - the person who has been pursuing riches for years might one day, after seeing some results there, suddenly decide that she wants the best *body* that money can buy - and so launches off in pursuit of another idol called *vanity and conceit.*, etc.

And so, there is this sort of downward spiral - a kind of downward mobility - with one improper desire leading people away into temptation and a trap, which leads to a further desire that is foolish and harmful and so it goes as the person spirals down toward ruin and destruction.

And so Paul concludes and summarizes what he has been saying in verse 9 with the very familiar, but often mis-quoted verse 10, "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." There is a kind of parallelism going on here: The "love of money" in verse 10 parallels those who "want to get rich" in verse 9. The "all kinds of evil" of verse 10 parallels the "temptation and trap" and "harmful desires" in vs 9. The phrase "pierced themselves with many griefs" found in vs 10, parallels vs 9's "ruin and destruction".

Now this kind of thing - parallelism - is a very Hebrew thing to do and Paul being a self-described "Hebrew of Hebrews" would be no stranger to that kind of writing. And, as this sort of parallelism goes, you have a first line, and then you get a repeat of ideas in the second line which is pretty exact, with the exception that sometimes the second line provides some new information, or adds some further element, which is what happens here with the phrase "have wandered from the faith" in vs 10.

You see, one of the consequences of the desire and pursuit of money, in addition to what has already been said, is that this pursuit has led many people away from the faith - which could be taken in two ways. One way to wander from the faith is to throw in the towel and walk away from the whole thing. In other words, the idolatry of money - allegedly birthed in the pursuit of "godliness" - but that idolatry, for some professing believers can, eventually, lead to a show down between the pursuit of the idol and belonging to the community of God's people - which then becomes just one more thing sacrificed on the altar.

The other way to understand this phrase is that the wandering that takes place is a kind of *doctrinal* wandering - a departure from the central truths of "the faith" - an embrace of strange beliefs and un-biblical ideas which oppose the Gospel. In this scenario the person is still there - still seemingly aligning themselves with the Christian faith - at least on outward appearances, but on the inside, with regard to what is actually believed, and what is actually going on in their hearts - there is a grave, and damaging, and even heretical departure from the Gospel truths.

So, Paul, in the face of a lot of false teaching on these things, counters the unbiblical idea that godliness is a means to financial gain - with the truth that godliness IS a means to gain - but of a very different sort. It is a means to gain, firstly because godliness is its own best reward. But it is also a means to gain because the contentment that accompanies true godliness will safeguard the believer from the idolatry of riches and the self-destructive path that it so easily sets us upon.

Well, how are we to respond to these things? In addition to some connections you may have already made on the way through - which I hope you are doing all the time - let me just highlight a couple things for us all to consider and respond to.....

Firstly, there is not a person in this room, I dare say, who could read these words and not see something of themselves, probably a *great deal* of themselves, in these verses. If you don't, then you're probably lying to yourself about other things too. We live in a country that has about 6-8% of the world's population and uses something like 50% of the world's resources and the other 92-98% of the world's people has to divide up the other half amongst themselves. Those aren't exact figures, of course, but it is something like that. And it's crazy. And if you live in this country and are not somehow a reflection of that reality - then you're some kind of amazing person.

But for the rest of us, I think it's pretty fair to say that we have a problem in this area. The pursuit of riches, and the idolatry that it can become, is never very far away from any one of us and, surely, has many devoted followers in this room. So, one response to all of this, if you're like me, is that you need to confess and ask God to deal with your own heart, and your own idolatry, in this area. You need to pray and ask God to show you the ways in which your pursuit of this particular idol has already led to some sacrifices that ought not to have been made - and which perhaps are still being made - on a daily basis. You need to ask God to impress upon your conscience the ways in which you have already engaged in moral compromise. And I dare say most of you already know what kinds of things I am talking about. You guys know, don't you?

I mean, here we are, once again, staring tax season in the face. Who has not come to this event, every year, and not been tempted, in your idolatry of money, to fudge on the truth a little bit - to claim more than you should over here, to neglect to report certain things over there. Who has not been tempted by these things? And that's just one example. But it is a telling one. And the fact that these sorts of temptations are real mean that some heart work needs to be done. And so we need to ask God to help us be honest with ourselves, and reveal some stuff that is true, even if uncomfortable. And in the process, all kinds of things may be uncovered that need to be deal with. So deal with them.

At the same time, recognize what is and is NOT being said here. Paul is not saying that we all need to go out and take vows of poverty here. He is not saying that money is evil or that we all need to sell our possession and move to a farm in Montana and live off berries and nuts, and sing "Kum-Ba-Yah". He's not saying that. This is not a

call to poverty, but it IS a call to *simplicity*. It is a warning to your adulterous heart of the dangers that accompany wealth and how hard it is to have and use it in responsible ways - which is possible - but which presents you with a constant challenge and battle for the affections and loyalty of your heart.

And so, for some of you, it may well be the case that you need to off-load some of your excess baggage. Not because any of it is evil in itself, but because it is, for you, is the thing that leads you to sin - the battle that you keep losing, and which requires the radical surgery that Jesus was talking about when he says, "if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off" - which was not the endorsement of dismemberment but was simply his very picturesque way of saying we need to be prepared to do radical things and take radical steps in guarding our hearts from the sin and idolatry that so easily consumes us. For some of you, that might just mean holding a fire sale.

Finally recognize that as important as all those sorts of things are, they won't make any difference unless your inordinate affection for things is replaced by a consuming passion for Christ, and a growing satisfaction in Him. And let me assure you that such a thing is entirely possible, because if you are His, you can know that you are secure in Him. You can know that his disposition toward you is sure, his mercy toward you is boundless. He has paid for your idolatry. He has delivered you from your enslavement to sin.

And the future that he promises you is greater than any future promised by sin and the idolatry which still contends for your affections on a daily basis. This is what you need to focus your eyes upon. Because you will not make any progress in this area, no matter how much purging you do of your lust for things - but you will not make any progress until you recognize the greater beauty of Christ. You will not make progress until you realize that what you've been drinking, that you thought would quench your thirst, is really just *sewer water* - when compared to the clear, clean, refreshing, fulfilling living water that Christ is. Until you see that you have settled for leftovers dug out of some dumpster when you could have a meal beyond your wildest imagination - you will not change. And so it is that you must be as concerned to re-set your misplaced affections on the only thing - the only One - that is worthy of receiving them. When that happens, change is possible. Without that, all the trying harder in the world will amount to nothing. And next year's new year's resolutions will sound disturbingly similar to this year's.....