

Scripture: 1 Timothy 6:3-10; **Text:** 1 Timothy 6:6-8

## Learning Godly Contentment

Brothers and sisters in Christ, Discontent, as someone has called it, 'is *life's thief*.' It robs you of happiness, peace and satisfaction. It robs you of thankfulness God wants from you. You think about what you don't have. And when you get what you want – a new home, your worship style, a change in job – you'll soon find it's not good enough. When you are discontent, it's hard to be thankful. It says, 'I want better; I deserve better.' It's a lust for more.

The kind of discontent that the apostle Paul addresses here in 1 Timothy 6:3-10 is wealth and riches. Here in verses 6-8, the Lord, through the apostle Paul, encourages us to *learn* godly contentment in an age of discontent and greed. Contentment is learned in the Christian life, worked in your heart by His Spirit. To be content means "to be satisfied with one's lot in life."

Our hope in this sermon is that: first, you may know God's grace is there for you to live contentedly; second, that you may experience the great gain in contentment.

Regarding contentment, we see

1. the rewarding place of contentment [v.6]
2. the realistic perspective of contentment [vv.7-8]

1. Its rewarding place [verse 6].

In verse 6, we read, "*Now godliness with contentment is great gain.*" Now the apostle Paul is responding to the greed in the church. False teachers were using godliness [or religion] to make a profit. They were in it for the money. They outwardly practice godliness; because there is good money in it; it was the way of becoming rich. As verse 5 says, "*who suppose that godliness is a means of gain*" [v.5].

There is a special word for such people today: 'religious hucksters' [a huckster is a peddler, trafficker]! Material or financial gain prompts them to teach and preach. By their teaching and showmanship, they court the favor of their listeners and eventually their money. They are not 'in it' for your souls, but for your money. They are not 'God-fearing.'

The apostle Paul goes on to say this, "*now godliness with contentment is great gain.*" What is God's Word telling us here? His Word is not saying that there are two kinds of godliness: one, with contentment and the other, without contentment.

There is only one kind of godliness, the one with contentment and this is great gain. The apostle Paul seems to say that what these teachers have is not true godliness. They are puffed up, are corrupt in their minds. They are not concerned with the wholesome words of our Savior. By their words and example they engender strife, greed and envy. This is the lifestyle of the discontent! It's not godliness.

"Godliness' or 'to be godly' shows in the fruits of a right ['saving'] relationship with God through faith in Christ. The risen Christ works in you by His Spirit; you repent of your greed and selfishness. With

the implanting of new life, the fruits of the Spirit appear – even though these fruits are not yet fully ripe in the believer.

Here in verse 6, 'contentment' is intimately associated with godliness. They are twins. Really you cannot separate the two from each other. With godliness comes contentment. Such contentment no longer grasps, reaches out for more. It is our nature, our inclination, not to be content because our sinful passions rule us. We complain; we become envious; we become greedy. But, child of God, He has given you what you need to conquer these evils. You have God's grace; by His Holy Spirit you learn contentment.

The Bible says 'godliness with contentment' is gain; it is "great gain." What is that 'great gain?' Contentment is 'rest'; it's rest in Christ; it's being settled in Him and that is great gain. It's resting in Him and His work for you; namely, eternal life, an eternal inheritance in Christ that money cannot buy! Through Christ, Calvin says, "we become not only heirs of the world but are enabled to enjoy Christ and all His riches." Contentment then has a very rewarding place in the Christian life.

Now this gift of contentment does not exclude personal aspirations, ambition, working hard to get ahead in life, promotion in the work place, or entering into the competitive market. These are good desires –when done for God's glory and kingdom. Through these, God also provides for your family and His church.

Contentment doesn't kill all desire as Buddhism teaches. The contentment which God gives in Christ, however, rescues desire from envy, discontent, and greed which ultimately leads to destruction and ruin, as we see in verses 9-10. It rescues desire from serving self to serving the Lord; it rescues desire from grasping to giving; it rescues desires from clinging to what this world has to fixing our eyes on the eternal inheritance to come which Christ has gained. The believer has wealth untold – which Christ bought with His blood for undeserving sinners like us.

"Godliness with contentment is great gain." May this contentment find a special place in our lives. It's a 'rest' to pray for, grow in, and to learn. The apostle Paul himself also struggled with this and says, "I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content" [Philippians 4:11].

This brings us to our second point,

## 2. Its realistic perspective [vv.7-8]

Here we see why contentment has such a rewarding place in the Christian life, given the realistic perspective of verses 7-8.

I remember when I was in 7th grade, our class learned to do 'perspective art.' In this class, we learned how to draw pictures in perspective. I drew a train track, putting its long distance into perspective. I still remember doing that and I didn't learn very well. My train track *lacked* the right perspective. Instead of looking like a train track gradually narrowing into the distance, it looked like an upright ladder, as my friend told me. Likewise, the world lacks the perspective that true contentment provides. That's all the world has – the things of this life. Its obsession blinds one to the perspective of reality.

As verse 7 goes on to say, “*for we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.*” In light of this, greed makes no sense at all. These are two undeniable, unchangeable truths about human possessions: you brought nothing in when you came into the world and you will carry nothing out. As one commentator says, “nothing in; nothing out.” Every person who has ever lived leaves the world in the same way he came. He leaves all his possessions behind in this world, when he dies.

Consider Job, a God-fearing man. He was the wealthiest man in the world in his day. Job had possessions, beyond what anyone could imagine, but they were all taken away. He lost his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his camels, his servants, his children, and almost his own wife who said, “curse God and die.” When this happened, Job fell on the ground and worshiped God saying, “*Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD*” {Job 1:21}.

Ryken, in his commentary, tells the story of a millionaire. When he died, everyone wanted to know what was in his will. So they whispered to the minister, 'How much did he leave behind?' “Everything!” the minister said. “He had to leave it all behind!”

Sometime ago, someone told me about his brother and his wife who were vacationing in Florida. While in Florida, he fell and broke his hip. He and his wife left everything behind for the time being and he flew by air ambulance to a hospital in Ontario. Soon, he was on the mend, feeling better, ready to go back to Florida with his wife to pick up their belongings. Suddenly a vein burst near his brain and he died in hospital two days later. He carried nothing away with him. Never would he think [neither we] that he would not be going back with his wife to gather their material belongings – his car, his suit or his favorite chair.

Perspective makes all the difference. He lived with this perspective that true contentment provides: during his life he kept his eyes fixed at that point -where the passageway from the grave meets his eternal inheritance in Christ beyond the horizon.

The writer in Ecclesiastes thought about these things, too, and wrote about how no one carries anything away in his hand. He writes, “*As he came from his mother's womb, naked shall he return, to go as he came; and he shall take nothing from his labor which he may carry away in his hand*” {Ecclesiastes 5:15}. Likewise, the Psalmist in Psalm 49 talks about those who praise a man who does very well for himself, yet that man's glory will not follow him when he dies: “*Do not be afraid when one becomes rich, when the glory of his house is increased; for when he dies he shall carry nothing away; his glory shall not descend after him. Though while he lives he blesses himself [for men will praise you when you do well for yourself], he shall go to the generations of his fathers...*” {Psalm 49:16-19}.

The grave, however, is not where life ends the believer, but it's the point where we go to be with Christ – forever. As the Psalmist in Psalm 49 confesses, “*But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for He shall receive me*” [v.15].

Having this realistic perspective ought also to shape our life today. So what is it we need in the meantime? The apostle Paul continues in verse 8, saying, “*and having food and clothing, with these we*

*shall be content.*” Food and clothing -- with these we should be and can be content. Clothing here literally means 'shelter' or 'covering.' This includes clothing, house and heat to keep the house warm, in addition to the food He supplies for your table. Everything else is really extra, or you can say, `added bonus.` The apostle Paul reflects the teaching of Jesus regarding life's essentials in Matthew 6:25ff; do not worry about what you will eat or drink or what you will wear ... “*for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.*”

Picture a baby, for a moment. Isn't that exactly the picture presented in verse 8. A baby is content with food and a covering. A beautiful illustration of child-like contentment; in this case, our child-like trust in our heavenly Father who has given in Christ a kingdom and an inheritance, “that will never perish, spoil or fade away” [1 Peter 1:3-5].

Think about how much of our discontent focuses on those things that are extra – a discontent born out of greed, envy, and selfishness. It was said some years ago [probably the figures are outdated], that a typical supermarket in the United States in 1976 stocked 9000 articles; today it carries 30,000. How many of them are absolutely essential?

Again, there is nothing wrong with these things. But the contentment which God gives in Christ can so easily be compromised by envy, discontent, and greed. Contentment will never come from owning things. Never. These will never satisfy the cravings of your soul. This is because God didn't make us this way. He made us to live in relationship with Him and with one another. Material things are a cheap, empty substitute.

It is often funerals that quickly brings focus, showing us the realistic perspective of verse 7, “nothing in; nothing out.” Funerals, again and again, bring into sharp focus that without life in Christ--, and the hope of life to come, life is empty, so empty.

True contentment has nothing to do with material prosperity or the pocket, but it has everything to do with our heart. It's a heart issue. In the context of *learning* contentment, Paul shows the necessity of depending on Christ and living by faith out of Him, “*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me*” {Philippians 4:13}. By learning contentment, people of God, we experience its rewarding place and the things of our thrilling eternity [the glory of Christ, the eternal inheritance earned for you] begin to shape your view of the temporary things of the dying present. It's just that – temporary. Someone has said it this way, “possessions are only the traveling luggage of time; they are not the stuff of eternity.”

In closing, child of God, these words of Hebrews 13:5 exhort us, “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” Amen.