
Cultivating Contentment

1 Timothy 6:6-8; Hebrews 13:5-6

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Summary

Contentment is a great ground and root for sustaining grace giving.

Introduction

The great British thinker and leader of years gone by, G.K. Chesterton wrote, "Christianity has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and left untried." Nothing is more to the point than when we think about money and contentment.

The sign on a bank, "We can loan you enough money to get you completely out of debt" says it all. Many Christians so caught up in the pursuit of money and wealth would chuckle nervously at such folly.

In stark contrast to that stands C.T. Studd, one of the great pioneer missionaries in England in the 19th century. He was an outstanding cricket player in England who had also received a large inheritance. But he had decided to go to Africa as a missionary. As a great witness to the world of the sufficiency of Christ and the supremacy of loving sacrifice, he gave away all of his wealth to several ministries. He gave some to his fiancée who immediately gave hers away as well. Then he went to Africa on the barest of support.

What kind of thinking and wanting can be the fruitful soil of such sacrifice and spending for the Kingdom? All through the hardships that his mission endeavors brought, there runs this constant theme of having cultivated a deep and abiding contentment with Christ.

So let's take up two Scriptures and consider them together.

Its Supreme Gain

1 Timothy 6:2b-10

Here is both wonder and warning: gain and pain. At the center of it is the relationship between doctrine and danger where what we crave makes us vulnerable to error in teaching and to sin in living.

In the Practical Connections

(v.2b-6)

The Biblical *standard* against which all teaching much be judged is *established* (v.3). It is weighed against sound words, correct propositional statements that correspond to the teaching of the Scriptures and the Lord. It is also weighed against the teaching that shapes true godliness.

The inward *characteristics* of the false teacher's heart are *evaluated* (v.4a). He is shown to conceited, ignorant and primarily concerned about controversy, particularly controversial questions and word-strife.

The divisive *consequences* of controversy are *explained* (v.4b-5a). The focus on controversial questions and disputes about words is the seedbed of envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions and never ending friction. It is error that divides and truth that unites.

The underlying *rationalization* of a materialistic heart is *exposed* (v.5b). They wrongly believe that religion is the way to riches.

This text frames for us how to evaluate an error:

- Content – What is being taught over against the texts of Scripture?
- Character – What are the people like who are teaching it?
- Consequences – What does the teaching produce?
- Cause – What is the primary underlying reasoning?

What is portrayed here is men, depraved in mind and deprived of truth, who stir up controversy by teaching error; men whose hearts are actually pursuing *gain* instead of *godliness*. It is important to realize that we think of as the health and wealth teaching is not new. All through history in general and in the history of the church, religion has been used to justify or even to generate sinful wealth.

So we don't come to this topic as though it were merely a matter of money – truth and error in doctrine often have error in stewardship connected. Religious leaders can misuse the Bible to try to extract money from you or to promise you things the Bible does not. While there are many appeals that are used, the most fundamental is a lack of contentment.

In the Power of Contentment

(v.6-8)

Godliness does bring real gain, but only when accompanied by contentment. The gain that godliness brings is not material, but rather true treasures that can only be appreciated by a heart satisfied with God, His providences (v.7) and His provision (v.8).

How can I be a person whose godliness is accompanied by contentment and is therefore a real gain?

- Right evaluation of the failing and fleeting nature of all that we often prize so much but is temporal and passing (v.7).

We didn't bring it with us and we can't take it with us. As one will and testament read, "Being of sound mind and body, I spent it all." It rusts and corrupts and breaks here. We buy insurances and warranties to replace it. Yet we have no warranty for it beyond our

death. Why is it so hard for us to see how passing and fleeting all this is in this life?

At the end when we die, I will take nothing with me and will have what treasures I have in heaven laid up. I can't send my stereos, and computers and houses on ahead. But I can invest in the gospel locally and globally so that the purposes and plans of the Kingdom are supported and sustained.

And finally, I will not face God with any of my stuff. I will give an accounting for my stewardship. What lasting treasures did I invest in? How much did I really value and treasure this life with all its stuff and not value and treasure God?

- Deep satisfaction with the basic provisions of life (v.8).

We are reminded often in Scripture to be content with basic necessities. What we consider to be basic necessities often reveals what we want and will cling to. Our "must haves" that are supported by debt show us where we are not content with the basics.

John Piper (and others as well) have called for Christians to return to living more simple, basic lives and give the wealth of our world and time to serve the Gospel. He calls having a war-time mentality. I agree that this is a Biblical call. But I am concerned that it becomes a mark of spiritual place and thus feeds spiritual pride.

What I would call for is an utter commitment to the Kingdom of God, the local expression in a gathered, covenant community, a church. If we have a vision for our selves as loving God supremely through loving people sacrificially, I am convinced that, yes, we will need messages like this, but they will rest on you more as affirmation than as admonition.

In the Potential of Riches

(v.9-10)

Christians must be wary of wealth. That sounds strange in our ears, doesn't it? These two verses show us the corrupting power of prizing and pursuing wealth. Now it is not *being* wealthy that destroys; it is the *desire* for wealth (v.9) and the *love* of money (v.10) that has a soul and life destroying capacity.

- Wanting riches exposes us to the kind of temptations that ensnare us into addictive and harmful practices. We become entrapped in the mesh of our desires and thus are plunged into spiritual and physical ruin. Wanting riches, for example, may cause us to borrow more than we are able to pay and thus make us the servant of our debt. Wanting riches may expose us to terribly addictive sins whose grip ever tightens until we are destroyed in its tentacles.

- Loving money is a root from which all kinds of evil grows up whose clinging vines choke out our spiritual life and whose thorns pierce and poison bringing terrible grief. Pursuing money may lead you to wander from the faith and bring deep depression and despair.

Why is this so? Consider Matthew 6:24. Because Jesus has taught us clearly that it is not possible to serve both God and money: not that it is not desirable, not that it is not the best, not that it is forbidden – rather, it is impossible. When you serve money and wealth, you are not serving God and cannot serve God. And when you are truly serving God, you will not and cannot be serving money.

Its Solid Grounds

Hebrews 13:5-6

In this closing section of Hebrews, the author shows what acceptable worship yields in practical godly living. After dealing with how love lives in our hospitality and in our homes, he points to how love must not be allowed to fasten onto things.

In its Clear Precept

(v.5a)

This exhortation speaks to our materialism. Listen to how this is phrased. “Keep your lives free from the love of money.” That command is so plain and clear yet is so often repeated in the Bible. Is your lifestyle marked by not loving money? Do people look at the way you live and have no questions about whether you are serving God and money?

What is the remedy? Satisfied contentment. A Biblical Christian is marked by a deep contentment with God’s provision for Him. He is grateful for it. He keeps laying up treasure in heaven so that his heart will not long for earthly riches. Whether in much or in need, Paul had learned the secret of contentment.

So then, do we go out and sell our houses and cars and stereos and give away our bank accounts? Only if you make choices to serve them and want them and provide for more and better of them rather than serving and wanting and sacrificing for Christ.

In Its Sure Promise

(v.5b)

How are we motivated to keep our hearts free from the love of money? We are motivated by the power of a promise. We have God’s sure promise. This is stated in the most emphatic way possible. “I will not ever for sure never leave you and will not and cannot forsake you ever.”

I know that the sinfulness of my own heart is exposed when this really does not motivate me. This promise is supposed to stir up hearts to the hard work of sacrificial love, hospitality to strangers, keeping our marriage vows and not loving money. But does it? Frankly, are you ready now to go out to the task because God is there with you and will never leave you?

Why is this? Is it because we simply do not value and prize the presence of God with us? Does this promise excite you for love and hospitality and purity and so on? Here it is once again. Loved ones, hungering and desiring God ought to so burn in our hearts that we will be satisfied with no less. And that hunger and desire will leap up with an affirming “Yes!” when promises of the abiding presence of God are heard.

In Its Spoken Purpose

(v.6)

That is what verse 6 is all about. The presence of God motivates godly living when we respond with thought out and committed confidence. We say to ourselves and others that God’s promises mean that God will help us. And because He will help us, we will not fear the threats or pressure or persecution of man. What can man do? The worst is to cause pain and bring death. But they cannot do even that if God does not allow it.

Do you respond to God’s sure promises with inward spoken purposes? God says He will be with us when we are tempted to sin. He will be with us when we choose to treasure heaven more that we value earth. And we will not fear what man can do to us when we care for one another. We will not fear the scorn of others when we stand for purity. We will not fear for our future security and safety.

For many there is nothing like financial uncertainty and personal threat to make them tremble and maybe not trust. And we do live in uncertain times. Some of you do not know if your job will be there next week or next month. You want to be sure that your future is secured – that you will have the money to pay the bills. But here we are with our hearts wrapped around things the promises of God at hand and the preserving grace of God in our hearts. So, we must not fear – we must trust.

Conclusion

Now let me bring this message to bear on stewardship.

- Contentment will keep us from taking God's money and spending it on ourselves. It will protect us from misspending and misappropriating the resources God has placed in our hands and under our stewardship.
- Contentment will free us to pursue God's Kingdom and store up treasures in heaven. It will release our hearts from being gripped by greed and being graced by God.
- Contentment will shape us to work hard to gain so that we can give. It will turn our ever increasing salaries into resources for ever increasing giving. Rather than our spending rising with our income, our giving does.
- Contentment will help us to make Christ look large to the world around us. There is no witness of the glory of God as when Christians will utterly sacrifice themselves for good of God and His people.