

The Books of 1 and 2 Timothy

Lesson 7: Godliness with Contentment -- 1 Timothy 6:1-21

There is a moment that comes to almost everyone, usually late at night, when the noise of the day has quieted and a single restless question rises up: is this enough? The new car, the better house, the next raise, the thing we were sure would finally satisfy, somehow it never quite does. We get it, and the horizon simply moves. Paul writes the closing chapter of this letter to people caught in exactly that ache, and he hands them a treasure disguised as a quiet sentence: “godliness with contentment is great gain” (v. 6). Not godliness with wealth. Godliness with contentment. There is a kind of riches the bank cannot hold.

Paul is dead honest about the alternative. There were teachers in Ephesus who had turned religion into a business, “imagining that godliness is a means of gain” (v. 5), using the name of Christ to fill their own pockets. And behind them stood a whole crowd of ordinary people who were not preachers at all but who quietly worshiped money in their hearts. To them all Paul says the famous, piercing words: “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” (v. 10). Money is not the problem. The love of it is a hook that drags people away from God and leaves them bleeding.

So Paul calls his young friend to a different life entirely. “Flee these things,” he says, and then “pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness” (v. 11). “Fight the good fight of the faith” (v. 12). The Christian life is not a stroll through a shopping mall; it is a race to run and a fight to win, with eyes fixed not on the next purchase but on the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul lifts our gaze to a God “who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light” (v. 16), and tells us to set our hope there.

And to those who do have money, Paul does not say throw it away. He says something wiser and warmer: do not be haughty, do not set your hope on something as uncertain as riches, but be “rich in good works,” generous and ready to share, “storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future” (vv. 18-19). Here is the secret hidden in this whole chapter. The way to hold money without being held by it is to give it away in love. So as we close the book of First Timothy, let us ask God to free us from the hook, to fill us with contentment, and to make us rich toward Him.

Group Discussion: Paul says “godliness with contentment is great gain” (v. 6). What does our culture tell us will finally make us content, and how is the contentment Paul describes different from simply getting what we want?

Personal Reflection: Paul warns that “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils” (v. 10). Where does the love of money, or the craving for more, show up most subtly in your own heart, and what would it look like to loosen its grip this week?

Study Questions

1. Paul confronts teachers who imagine “that godliness is a means of gain,” and answers that “godliness with contentment is great gain” (vv. 5-6). What does this teach us about the difference between using religion for profit and the true gain that godliness brings?
2. Paul reminds us, “we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world” (v. 7). How does remembering this truth reshape the way you hold your possessions, your money, and your plans?
3. Paul writes that “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” (v. 10). What does this teach us about the spiritual danger of money, and how it can pull a believer away from Christ?
4. Paul says, “if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content” (v. 8). What does true contentment look like in your life, and where do you most struggle to be content with what God has provided?
5. Paul charges Timothy to “flee these things,” and instead “pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness” and to “fight the good fight of the faith” (vv. 11-12). What does this teach us about the active, fighting nature of the Christian life?
6. Paul tells Timothy to “take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (v. 12). How does remembering your own confession of Christ strengthen you to keep fighting and holding on today?
7. Paul charges Timothy before God “who gives life to all things” to keep the commandment “until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ” (vv. 13-14). What does this teach us about the Christian’s hope and the certain return of Christ?
8. Paul commands the rich “not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches,” but to be “rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share” (vv. 17-18). Whatever your income, where is God inviting you to hold your resources more loosely and to give more freely?
9. Paul ends by charging Timothy, “O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge” (v. 20), set against the glory of God “who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light” (v. 16). What is the deposit we are to guard, what does it mean to guard it against false knowledge, and how does the glory and sovereignty of God anchor this charge?
10. Look back across the whole chapter, and the whole letter. Paul has called us to godliness with contentment, the good fight of faith, and the guarding of the gospel. Name one specific way Jesus is using this passage to form you, and one concrete step you will take because of it.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Matthew 6:19-21, storing up treasure in heaven rather than on earth; Philippians 4:11-13, learning the secret of contentment in any circumstance; Hebrews 13:5, keep your life free from love of money and be content; Luke 12:15-21, the rich fool who was not rich toward God; 2 Timothy 4:7-8, the good fight finished and the crown awaiting.