

Contentment - Kevin Miller, 30 minutes, **1 Timothy 6:3-10** (#539)

Introduction: Christmas will soon be upon us, and while each of our families have different traditions and hopes for what the holiday will bring, one thing I am pretty sure about is that most of us will enjoy receiving a present or two.

Have you ever considered why we give presents to one another during Christmas? How is it that the day we celebrate as Christ's birthday ends up being a time for you and I to gain? One answer could be that giving and receiving presents teaches us something about the gift we have received in Christ. As far as it goes, that's fair. But for many people in this nation – people who don't trust Jesus and may not know anything about Him beyond the warped snippets on the news – the whole point of Christmas is the gifts. Consumerism on full display. So much is this the case that there can be a letdown for folks – Christian or not – if they don't receive the present they were hoping for.

This isn't just a Christmas-time problem, is it? One of the hallmarks of a Western capitalist culture like ours is the idea that money and “stuff” are some of the most important things in life. We are explicitly told *not* to be content with what we have because being content means we won't work for and consume more “stuff.”

This morning, what Paul wants us to see is not that you need to go out and return all your Christmas presents, nor is it that capitalism is bad or that you should feel guilty if you own nice things. No, what Paul has in mind is actually both deeper and more transformational: Christians are to be content not with their things, but with their God. When we are content in Him, then our focus is not on what we have, how we look, or the balance in our bank accounts. It isn't on our house or the

car we drive or the vacations we take. Instead, we'll be content in any and every circumstance because what we want and need most – relationship with our Savior – is exactly what we have. If we fail to grasp this important part of the Christian life, we slowly but surely begin think of our faith like the world thinks of Christmas: “what’s in it for me?” “What will God give me if I follow Him?” “Why hasn’t He done what I want?” And that kind of thinking is deadly to true faith.

Let’s see how this plays out in **1 Timothy chapter 6, starting with verse 3**. The truths of this passage are a very real gift given by the God of the universe to you...

6:3-5 As Paul has already done twice before in this letter (**chapters 1 and 4**), he turns once again to addressing the false teachers who were present in the Ephesian church and the influence that they were trying to wield over the people there. At the end of **verse 2**, we read a transition: “teach and urge these things.” These words point back to several examples that Paul wrote to illustrate how the church of God is a family. These same words also point forward, to the contrast between what Paul has just taught and what the false teachers are teaching and promoting. What, then, does Paul want Timothy to take particular note of?

First, we read a definition: in **verse 3**, we see that false teaching is not agreeing with Jesus. Any teacher of the Scriptures, anyone who wishes to instruct Christ’s church, must do so in a way that follows the teachings and pattern of Christ. Anything less – any different doctrine, any disagreement with what our Lord has taught – is to veer off the highway into the deadly ditch of what is unsound.

Ask yourself this before we continue: do you agree with Jesus? More specifically: when you are reading the Bible and you come across something that doesn’t fit

well with our world or your circle of friends or your workplace, what do you do? When you read the Scriptures highlighting homosexual behavior as sin, do you agree with the Bible by your words and actions, or do you try to explain it away? When the Scriptures speak to the value of all life – not only adults, but also children and infants – is that something that you embrace regardless of your politics, or is that something that you take your cues from society on?

There are many other examples I could bring up. My point is simply this: do you trust and hold to Christ's words – are they your filter for life? Or do you hold to what your own preferred subculture has decided, and only read the Scriptures through that lens? The first is faithful, it is the radical kind of faith and belief that Christians are called to. The second is not, and it's deadly to genuine faith. You and I are called to agree with Jesus. Pray, ask Him to change your heart and your mind so that you would see as He sees and believe all that He has said.

In **verse 4**, we read something of the character of these false teachers and those like them: they presume to think themselves competent to teach the church, yet the reality is far different. They are puffed up with pride and they actually don't understand anything of what matters in life and eternity. This destructive mindset leads to all kinds of very real and visible sins: they crave controversy and they quarrel about words. Both, by the way, are traits that are becoming increasingly common among Christians. Folks: outrage and constant anger are not the path of Christian faithfulness. Finding something to be upset about all the time and trying to catch people in their words should not be our goal. We are called to chart a different course, one marked by love and patience.

The reason is because this kind of mindset is like a poison that starts to affect everything about a person: it warps your view of the world and of other people. The result is envy, not love. It's disagreement on every possible issue, rather than unity on the main issues. It produces slander and character assassination rather than looking to build one another up. It results in being distrustful and skeptical of everybody – including fellow Christians – who doesn't think as you do. And it leads to a constant friction in the everyday interactions of life with other people.

Friends, we can disagree with others and still be respectful. We can argue differently, vote differently, and spend our time and money differently without devaluing the image of God in those whom we don't agree with. Paul is not calling Christians to be spineless – by no means! – but he is calling us to be distinctively Christian by how we interact with one another. Are your words and comments, online and in person, marked by grace, patience, a willingness to assume the best, and a sacrificial love? Are you being influenced by folks who care more about these values than about whatever the latest hot-button issue of our day is?

Paul is making great points, but an example would really help us to grasp things, wouldn't it? By God's grace, that is exactly what we have at the end of **verse 5**: these false teachers are doing what they do because they think that godliness – that a certain kind of religious life – will bring them great gain in the here and now. That gain might look like influence or power, it might look like material wealth, or it might look like being respected as the person who has all the answers. Note that all of those temptations are alive and well today through influencers, prosperity preachers, and controlling officials. So take note: what Paul is describing here isn't just a first century church problem – it's our problem, too! What is to be done? Paul's answer will be for everyone: since everyone can be tempted in these ways,

everyone – every Christian – is called to respond differently. How so? Let's keep reading...

6:6-10 The false teachers thought that religious activity would bring them gain in this life. Paul's response is that there is real gain, but it comes from contentment with the Lord. The example that he uses relates primarily to material wealth: we brought nothing into the world and – no matter how fancy the funeral – we can't take anything with us when we die. As one popular Christian author has said: "when life is over, all the pieces go back in the box." That's what these false teachers don't understand: the Christian life has important things for us here and now, it has joys that we receive in this life. But they are placeholders and appetizers for the eternal life that is to come. Your investment portfolio needs to be aimed at eternity, not just retirement. And that difference changes everything.

Notice how Paul states it in **verse 8**: food and clothing, with these we will be content. Not political power. Not workplace recognition. Not being the prom queen. Not fancy vacations. None of those things has to be wrong, but they so often can be, because they are the ways that our culture keeps score in this world. When we aren't careful, they become the ways that Christians keep score too. Paul's teaching is to call we Christians to the opposite: the Lord takes care of His people by providing what we need. Trust that the Lord will provide, and that – as your loving Heavenly Father – He'll do so in ways even better than what you can think of. That's the kind of faith we Christians are called to have. And that kind of faith leads to contentment, not striving; a loving and vibrant faith, not a crisis of wanting what our neighbors or favorite personalities have.

There is a very crucial and relevant warning in **verses 9-10**: the American Dream of working hard and making it big is not the Christian dream. Not that you shouldn't work hard. And if the Lord blesses you financially, then thank Him for that. But those are not the dreams that should motivate Christians. Why? Paul answers: it is because riches bring with them all kinds of temptations, and only a very foolish person would seek to tempt themselves. In fact, he goes on to write that many folks seeking wealth end up giving in to the temptations of this world: rather than loving the Lord and His people (which Jesus calls the greatest commandments), they start loving money and what it can buy in the here and now. Rather than "having no other gods" (as the ten commandments state), money tends to tempt us towards thinking that having enough of it lets us be in control of our own lives and destiny. The result of this kind of thinking and living is no faith at all. Too many will find out in their dying days that money can't save.

So, for you and I: what shall we do? We are to live radically different from the world around us. Not simply for the sake of being different. But because the natural inclinations of our world are wrong, misguided, and don't value eternal life, but instead lead to eternal death. When we hold to Christ's words, when we truly believe that all He has said is good: that He is preparing a place for us, that the Father cares for us more than sparrows, that He knows all we need – when we hold to those truths and live accordingly, you and I shall have a gain that lasts longer than all the world's money and a contentment that is worth more than anything you could ever buy. We'll be following our Savior, who didn't seek earthly riches. Whose food was from heaven. Whose significance came from an identity greater than what the world has to offer. Christ has blazed the way. The Spirit stands ready to help you enjoy His obedience. Let's follow Him together into the contentment of eternal life with our Savior and King, Jesus Christ!