

# CBC May 1 Communion Sunday

*“But godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Timothy 6:6 ESV)*

## **Godliness Over Gain**

**1 Timothy 6:3-10**

**May 1st, 2022**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning Cornerstone. It is my privilege this morning to open God’s word with you. I want to spend my time with you in 1 Timothy. I believe there’s a lot we could learn from this letter, but this morning I want to zoom in on one key aspect of the epistle: **the pursuit of godliness in the Christian life**. Pursuing godliness is what the Christian life is all about. Whether you are a brand-new Christian -maybe you’ve just walked through the doors for the first time this morning (welcome)- or you’ve been walking with Christ for decades, regardless, the pursuit of godliness is your main task at hand. At every stage of your journey of faith, you are called to pursue godliness – to look more like Christ. We are going to re-focus on that reality this morning.

Last week Pastor Jody talked about prayer and how fundamental it is to the Christian faith. Prayer is in fact at the heart of Godliness. Just as a heart pumps blood throughout the body to sustain life, prayer embodies our pursuit of godliness. This message is meant to be an extension from last week. We’ve been taught to pray, to be a praying church, and that is fundamental to our pursuit of godliness.

There has been so much chaos all around us over the past two years that has pulled us this way and that way. It’s shaken the faith of some and discouraged the faith in others. And I would argue, more than just survive, it’s time now for us to thrive in our identity in Christ. It’s time to get back to the basics of doing what we are called to do. And I don’t mean thrive in the physical or material sense, in fact the text we are looking at this morning speaks against that very thing;

rather, I'm saying that the Gospel isn't just about knowing Christ, it's about being like him- pursuing him- in every area of your life. That's what thriving looks like in this day and age. So, turn with me now to 1 Timothy chapter 6. We'll read the text in full now, verses 3-10, and then we'll break it down.

“If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For 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.” (1 Timothy 6:3-10 ESV)

In this text, the apostle Paul is writing to his young protégé, Timothy, to encourage him in his new role as a church leader. Chapter 6 begins with a description of true godliness, and it contains in it two major warnings: against false teachers and money. Paul, having told Timothy to “teach and urge these things” (v2), is now getting to the main reason for writing this letter: there were people there teaching differently. Paul elaborates in this text on the nature and identity of false teachers and those with a craving for earthly gain. In essence, he explains that their teaching DOES NOT lead to godliness, but the teachings of Christ DO.

So, how do we grow in Godliness in this day and age?

## How Do We Grow In Godliness?

Paul begins by reminding Timothy of the teachings of Christ. Before he warns him of the dangers associated with a life of ministry and faith, he reminds Timothy that Christ is first and foremost.

He writes:

“If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing.” (1 Timothy 6:3-4a ESV)

This is a core principle for the Christian church: all teaching which does not accord with the teaching of Christ will inevitably lead to her destruction.<sup>1</sup> Teaching that does not “accord with godliness”, as the text says, is consumed with a desire of foolish curiosity. So, it’s either A or B: teachings that accord with Christ, and everything else – everything that’s taught by a false teacher which is the first warning or hindrance to godliness which Paul gives. How do we grow in Godliness in this day and age? The first thing we see is that growing in godliness requires:

### 1. Staying on Course vs 3-5

This first point comes to us in the text via Paul’s warning about false teachers. Staying on course means not getting pulled away or distracted. Here Paul describes the type of false teacher who would seek their own gain. Look at these descriptors with me:

“He is **puffed up** with **conceit** and **understands nothing**. He has an unhealthy **craving** for **controversy** and for **quarrels** about words, which produce **envy**, **dissension**, **slander**, **evil suspicions**, and constant **friction** among people who are **depraved in mind** and **deprived of the truth**, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.” (1 Timothy 6:4-5 ESV)

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *1&2 Timothy & Titus*, (Crossway Books: 1998), p. 99 Calvin notes that their teaching will not build up the church.

Wow! What a list to describe false teachers. These guys are full of empty wind. They are full of envy which leads to anger and strong disagreements over the simplest of things. And they corrupt people's minds. You know which one of these characteristics stuck out to me? When Paul said they are "depraved in mind and deprived of the truth". That's the essence of it. They have a warped sense of right and wrong because they are without the truth of the Gospel. Their eyeglasses by which they see the world are dirty and therefore obscure their vision.

I know for myself sometimes when my glasses get really smudged and dirty, everything gets really blurring and I think to myself, "it might just be better if I take these things off." Because they've lost their usefulness in letting me see things clearly. (Maybe that's why I keep missing the laundry basket with my dirty socks- sorry hun.)

These false teachers have deviated from the teachings of Christ and look at where it's gotten them: they are causing dissension, friction, disunity. They are speaking slanderously, suspiciously, and craving controversy. Listen: **Gospel instruction aims at unity and love while unsound doctrine aims at division and discontentment.** They are causing a mess and Paul warns Timothy, that is not the way of godliness. Not only that, but he warns Timothy that he to be on guard against such people. Like a shepherd standing guard over his flock, Paul warns, "look out Timothy, there are wolves in sheep's clothes! And some may have already infiltrated your herd."

I'll tell you the worst part about these false teachers, as the text notes, is that they actual imagine that godliness is a means of gain (v. 5). They think godliness is for them! This kind of distorted thinking has some serious consequences. The Pharisees had this kind of thinking. Remember just a couple of weeks ago on Palm Sunday we talked about Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. What did the Pharisees say when they saw the people's response to his entry?

"The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they

heard he had done this sign. So the Pharisees said to one another, “You see that you are **gaining nothing**. Look, the world has gone after him.” (John 12: 17-19 ESV)

They are saying to each other, “we aren’t gaining like we should”, or in the NIV it reads, “See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!” They were in it for their own gain. In fact, they feared they were losing control of their people. And I’ll tell you this, that fear would ultimately grow in them until they had to have Jesus crucified. That’s the weight or gravity by which they were consumed with their desire for gain.

Now, I want to weave in some application points into each section, so, if you want to avoid letting false teachers get a hold of you or your church thereby hindering your pursuit of godliness then you need to:

#### A. Pursue Christ

That’s your focus, Christian. Christ is your north star. And all other stars are false teachers trying to divert your trajectory – trying to sell you a different source of true godliness.

You know the Pharisees thought godliness was for them! They imagined that it would lead to their gain. If, you think godliness leads to anything other than glorifying God, than you are living in your own imagination. You’ve been led astray by a wolf in sheep’s clothing because godliness is for God NOT for our gain. We don’t act like good people so that the world thinks better of us and trusts us. We act in such a way so that we point to Christ, so they’ll trust him.

If you want to pursue godliness, then be like Christ in everything.

When I was doing my studies over in Ireland, I discovered the writings of a 17<sup>th</sup> CE Particular Baptist named Benjamin Keach. Keach wrote an allegory and in it I think it best illustrates this idea. You’ve probably heard of the allegory by John Bunyan called *Pilgrims Progress*, well Keach’s allegory is much the same; it’s called *The Travels of True Godliness*. It’s the story of a

man named True Godliness and it's about his journey of faith home. There's one part in the story where True Godliness is talking to another character named Riches.

As Godliness is talking with Riches, Riches asks him, "Do you think I shall give entertainment to you, and lose all my great honour and credit amongst men?" But Godliness rightly replies, "Is not that honour that comes from God better than all the vain honour poor mortals can give you? ... Some rich and noble men have, for my sake, denied themselves all the glory of this world, and accounted the reproaches of Christ greater riches than earthly honours and the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season."<sup>2</sup>

Wow! True Godliness has forsaken all the things of this world for the things of Christ- that's true godliness. No motives, no goals, no desires beyond this- **to know Christ and make him known.**

What are your goals and desires?

Paul writes to Timothy to say that the mind-set that godliness leads to gain in this life is wrong. It is misguided. Instead, be like Christ who forsook everything by taking on the form of a man.

He became a son of man so that we might become sons of God.

So, stay the course. And secondly, growing in godliness requires:

## 2. Being Content vs 6-8

We've come to the heart of the text. Sandwiched in the middle of our text this morning is Paul's admonition of Timothy to pursue godliness. It's like he's giving Timothy two warnings about false teachers and money as bookends, and there in the middle he reminds Timothy what it's all about. It's not about our gain, our standing in the world, our advancement in society, it's about pursuing godliness. Look with me at verses 6-8.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, pp. 73-74.

“But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.” (1 Timothy 6:6-8 ESV)

Here Paul gives Timothy a formula for life and ministry: true godliness plus contentment equals great gain. Not power plus wealth, not popularity plus influence -all those things pass away; its godliness be paired with contentment which results in great gain. I'll explain it this way: the gain of the Christian life is eternal life with God. So, in order to live with that potential, we need things of eternal value now. Wealth and popularity won't cut it. Godliness and contentment are of eternal value because **godliness reflects God character, and contentment reflects our living within his will.**

Paul explains this in the following verse. He says, “we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of it.”

Here, Paul draws on a widely cited principle in antiquity from Job 1:21:

“And he said, ‘Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.’” (Job 1:21 ESV)

Again, it's that temporal versus the eternal. Even if someone were to gain great riches in this life, the gain is short-lived because, and I'll steal this from John Piper: “There are no U-Hauls behind hearses”. You can't take it with you so don't buy into it now. Your birth and death are meant to provide vantage points by which you can appraise the material things of life and determine what is truly necessary.<sup>3</sup> This isn't a new idea for Paul. Look back with me just a couple of chapters and see what Paul wrote in 1 Timothy chapter 4:

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<sup>3</sup> George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, (Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub., 1992), p. 253

“Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, **godliness is of value in every way**, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.” (1 Timothy 4:7-8 ESV)

Now this doesn't mean we don't need to go to the gym anymore; that's not our take-a-way this morning. But there is a clear contrast here between the physical and the eternal. Godliness has eternal value, so pursue it. Like sanctification, it is a daily process. We have to work at being content. There's an obvious application there; if we are going to be content, then we must:

## B. Pursue Contentment

Live with contentment.

You're not going to seek after the things of this world if you are content with what you have. You aren't going to covet your neighbours' things if you are content with yours. Paul really breaks this down for us in Philippians 4:

“Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in **whatever situation I am to be content**. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4:11-13 ESV)

Pursuing contentment requires daily prayer. Prayer sets our pursuit of Godliness of fire. As we learned last week, prayer is our first response not last resort. Now, sometimes we feel like we can only be content in God when he is who we want him to be, rather than who he is. When someone wrongs us, we want him to be just at the expense of his mercy; or when we make a mistake, we want him to be merciful when his righteousness would prevail. So, we base our contentment not on him but on the things he does for us. But that's not contentment; that's conditional servitude.



Thinking that, “if God does this, then I’ll response like that” is misguided. If you are not content in who he is right now, then you’ll never notice when your cup is overflowing. Contentment leads to mission.

Missions done from a place of contentment in God will overflow into this city in powerful ways.

A life without contentment will never be filled enough to overflow.

Contentment is just the first step which leads to mission. If you aren’t content with the Gospel, then how are you planning on sharing it?

How many people have you witnessed to this past year? Now how content are you with your life and your God? Is there a relationship there? And how about this one: how's your prayer life? Is there a relationship between your witness, your prayer life and how content you are in Christ? A relationship between how satisfied you are with Christ, and how passionate you are to share him and talk to Him. You can only feed the hungry.

I’ll leave that with you to think about, but to the final section of the text- as we stay the course, pursue contentment, we realise that growing in godliness requires:

### 3. Focusing On Eternal Things vs 9-10

When we talk about things that hinder our pursuit of godliness, Paul hits us with a great example which we need to have an honest discussion about- money. Now, I’m not the senior pastor here, so I feel comfortable having this talk with you, but I know that Pastor Paul would support us looking at money and having a proper understanding of it. The Apostle Paul warns in our text:

“But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For 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.” (1 Timothy 6:9-10 ESV)

What a sobering thought: that money can destroy someone’s faith. That’s the power that it can have. I almost want to say, “Look if that’s you, then you can have all my money; take it. I’d rather have you as a brother or sister in Christ than any amount in my bank account!” But it doesn’t work that way. You can’t buy your salvation, and you certainly can’t buy someone else’s.

**You can’t but praise be to God that he can!** And he did through his Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross, your salvation has been purchased once for all.

You know it’s almost alarming how much Jesus talked about money in the Scriptures. He discussed the topic of money more than he spoke of faith and prayer *combined*. There are over 2300 references to money and material things in the bible. Let’s do a brief systematic overview of what the Scriptures have to say about money:

“He who loves money **will not be satisfied** with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.” (Ecclesiastes 5:10 ESV)

“**Riches do not profit** in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.” (Proverbs 11:4 ESV)

“Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. **You have laid up treasure in the last days.**” (James 5:1-3 ESV)

“As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, **to be rich in good works**, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for

themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.” (1 Timothy 6:17-19 ESV)

So, the general perception for the desire for money in the bible isn't good. If you're new to the faith I wonder if that really surprises you? In our text this morning it says that money is the *root of all kinds of evil*. And we need to address that. We at least need to stop and ask why.

I would put before you this morning that money is Satan's currency of choice. It's his currency because it has an innate sense of value. And when we struggle to know our own value, or even what our values are and how they define us, we immediately turn to something tangible and easily identifiable. **The problem is: as soon as we identify our value in something like money, it begins to own us.** The text calls it a snare. It takes ownership of us because we've given it our value. Our money tells the truth about who we are and whose we are. Is it our master?

Here's the principle:

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:21 ESV)

Christian, what are you doing with your money? That's a trick question. Notice I said, “your money”. But it's not yours, it's his. If you are a professing Christian, your money is for building his kingdom, not yours.

But let's take a step back because there's something more going on here than just an attack on money. Actually, what Paul is getting at is that the CRAVING of things, such as money, which lead to evil, apostasy, ruin, and destruction. We can turn anything into an idol, isn't that true? Identify and deal with your idols this morning. Don't be idle about your idols. It's not about the size of your bank account, it's about how often you check it. That's what is consuming; that's what will affect your life. It will 100% effect your worship- particularly your giving. The root issue is your love for money.

How do we combat that desire in a culture which glorifies it:

### C. Be Set Apart

I mentioned earlier this book *The Travels of True Godliness*. Well, there's another scene I want to briefly mention here. There's one part in the story where True Godliness is talking to another character named Covetousness. True Godliness says this of Covetousness:

“He [Covetousness] hath also grievously corrupted many who profess kindness to me, by encumbering their minds so with the affairs of this life, that they cannot find the way to the church. When they should be hearing God's word, he forces them to abide in their shops; nor will he suffer many of them to take a little time to pray in their families, nor in their closets.”<sup>4</sup>

You see Covetousness succeeded in robbing many people not just of their possessions, but of their identity. He stole from them what was God's. **It wasn't just what they had, it was who they were.** That's what this text is warning us about. Covetousness is a bottomless pit.

You know that as Christians we aren't supposed to look like the world. When the church looks like the culture then it's failed at its job to change it: to be salt and light. We have been set apart to pursue godliness. The world isn't doing that. They are pursuing themselves; power, riches, self-gratifications, desires, feelings.... But we are pursuing Christ which looks completely opposite to that. **When we stop pursuing Christ, we begin to reflect the culture.** I love this J. C. Ryle quote:

“There is a common, worldly kind of Christianity in this day, which many have, and think they have enough – a cheap Christianity which offends nobody, and requires no sacrifice – which costs nothing, and is worth nothing.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Benjamin Keach, *The Travels of True Godliness*, (Boston: MA, 1829), pp. 71-72.

<sup>5</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Holiness*, (Baker, 1979), p. 204.

He wrote that in the 1800s, but man it is still true today!

If we aren't set apart, we'll become the same as the one's we are called to save with the Gospel.

This morning has been a reminder for all of us today to get back to and continue to pursue godliness. Let's not give the world a cheap and ultimately useless Christianity- a religion void of conviction. Let's show them godliness and give them Christ.

If we are going to live with godliness as our end goal and not gain, then it starts by looking more like Christ and less like this world. In fact, it's not so much Godliness Over Gain, as if one is competing against the other, but it's refocusing our vision to see that Godliness IS Gain for the Christian.<sup>6</sup> Remember our formula: true godliness plus contentment equals great gain- that's your life's goal. That's why, as I said off the top, it's time for us to get past just surviving and it's time for us to thrive- to gain in Christ- as Paul teaches us here. With this proper understanding of gain, we can now realise that we aren't made to simply survive, we are called to so much more- to thrive as children of God as we pursue godliness.

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<sup>6</sup> Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, (Inter-Varsity Press, 1990), p. 124