

A CONTENTED OR A COVETOUS GODLINESS?

1 Timothy 6:1-10

Dr. Kent Dresdow, Senior Associate Pastor

October 15, 2017

Note: The following are the pastor's notes used in preaching this message. This is not a complete, word-for-word transcription of what was preached. These notes serve as a companion to the complete message, which is available by listening to the audio version. Bible quotes are primarily from ESV.

INTRODUCTION

The goal of the message this morning is this: *that your heart would be quieted and comforted in these heart-shaking times through your growth in Christian contentment.*

I. Contentment in the workplace (1 Timothy 6:1-2)

Paul is commanding slaves in the church to honor their non-Christian masters. Some historical background with regard to slavery is needed to make the connection from ancient slavery to modern workplace. The slave population in ancient Rome was conservatively around 30% of the entire population of the Roman Empire during Paul's time. Others estimate that the slave population may have been as high as 50% at times. Slavery was not tragically-racially classed back then like it was in our country's history.

Roman slaves were in fact the property of their owners. However, according to the New International Bible Encyclopedia, slaves in Paul's time could generally count on being set free at some point; few reached old age as slaves. In fact, inscriptions from the period state that as many as half of all slaves were freed by the age of 30. Slaves could own property under the master's care—even owning their own slaves. A slave could own property, and could even save up to purchase their freedom. Furthermore, slavery was no indication of a lower social status. The slave assumed the social and commercial status of his master, such that if his master was the Caesar, the slave was basically more influential than the vast majority of freedmen in the Empire! And whereas American slavery was almost always despicably racist, Roman slavery was not. It must be stated, however, that the Roman institution still was abused, due to harsh masters and systemic injustices.

The Bible does not explicitly encourage revolt to overthrow the institution of slavery. It does, though, consistently promote freedom as a preferable state (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:21). Thus, in the end analysis, the Bible works to encourage submission to existing authority structures, while also pouring battery acid on the foundations of that same structure that is indeed not God's ideal (cf. Galatians 3:28). Spiritual freedom eventually works its way out in broader expressions of freedom in time.

With all that in mind, two observations can be made. First, Roman slavery was not similar to American slavery. Second, Roman slavery was somewhat more akin to American employment, where sometimes you have greater freedom, and sometimes less. Thus, the slave-employee connection made in the outline is at least a fairly parallel connection from the Roman world back then to the American workplace world today.

So then, how do you build contentment in the workplace?

A. Honor your non-Christian employer (1 Timothy 6:1)

Paul begins this section with the word *honor*. This should stand out to you if you've been tracking with us through this book (widows [1 Timothy 5:3ff] and elders [1 Timothy 5:17ff]). Now we are to honor our bosses (1 Timothy 6:1-2). This regarding them with *all* honor is not easy. Paul says that some may even consider it a yoke/burden! Nonetheless, the call to honor is imperative. Why? Because honoring is part of witnessing (1 Timothy 6:1b). So honor your non-Christian employer, especially if it is a yoke to you to do so.

B. Serve your Christian employer (1 Timothy 6:2)

If you have a Christian boss, servanthood is to mark the relationship. Being an employee is an opportunity to serve—giving your best effort to make your Christian boss-brother or boss-sister look good!

Every time you honor and/or serve your boss, you honor Christ Himself! So content yourself in this: your work can be your worship and witness.

II. THE FALSE TEACHERS' COVETOUS GODLINESS (1 Timothy 6:3-5)

A. Their teaching contorts (1 Timothy 6:3)

In both their teaching (1 Timothy 1:3-7) and their practice (1 Timothy 4:1-5), they contorted the sound words/life-giving words/healthy words of our Lord Jesus Christ. They were draining the health and vitality of the church, so Paul says to Timothy, "I'm urging you to teach the church to be on guard against that stuff" (1 Timothy 6:2b).

B. Their heart craves (1 Timothy 6:4a)

1. Arrogant heart

These guys were puffed up with conceit—filled with hot air—in their heart, and ignorant in their mind.

2. Sickened speech

The word *unhealthy* is actually the word literally *sickened*. They were making the church sick with controversy and quarreling over petty terms and theological arguments no one should care about or has time for. It does not grow contentment, it breeds discontentment.

C. Their sin corrupts (1 Timothy 6:4b-5)

1. They corrupt the church

The five things these false teachers produce in 1 Timothy 6:4b-5, I believe, are listed in order of progression.

a. Envy

Envy emerges in the heart when they sense displeasure when others acquire things they don't have. They're hurt when others surpass them in ministry, and resent when others are praised.

b. Dissension

This follows envy, as the internal envy leads to externally forcing people in the church to pick sides. "Are you with me, or them?" As these false teachers force people to choose sides, they next...

c. Slander

They lie behind the teachers' or elders' backs, gathering sympathy for their purposes over against the broader church's purposes. This creates...

d. Evil suspicions

Where their side assumes the worst in every action the other side takes. Sympathy dissolves into suspicion and critique, which is completely the opposite of 1 Peter 3:8. Finally, there erupts...

e. Constant friction

Once a church reaches this point, it's sickened to the point of crippling gospel ministry and witness. Eventually the disease they spread through the church settles in their own soul.

2. They corrupt themselves

a. Rotted in the mind

Paul draws the health metaphor out further here, suggesting that their mind is rotting.

b. Robbed of the truth

This is in the passive sense. The truth is taken from them, they don't forfeit it. It's subtly being drained out of their life.

c. Reversed in their godliness

Their true colors come out, their deepest motives are revealed, and they actually begin to believe that godliness is a means of material and monetary gain.

Implication: The health-and-wealth prosperity gospel that is ravaging the global Christian south in our time is growing like a cancer along these exact lines! This is a crisis in the global church that Paul is taking dead aim at here. Suggesting that God exists to make you healthy and wealthy is exactly what sickens the church, rots the mind, robs people of truth, and reverses true godliness! Brothers and sisters, for the health of the church and for the comfort of our own souls, we need to focus evermore on *true* godliness.

III. THE BELIEVER'S CONTENTED GODLINESS (1 Timothy 6:6-10)

A. The principle: contented godliness IS great gain! (1 Timothy 6:6)

There is great gain to be had when a Christian is content—satisfied with what one has! We have spiritual riches in Christ:

- Every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-4)
- All the riches of God's grace in Christ (Ephesians 1:7)
- An inheritance in Christ (Ephesians 1:11, 14)
- The riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints (Ephesians 1:16-21)
Because of the Father's grace, you ARE rich! Because of Christ's death and resurrection, you ARE strong! We must focus on the godliness that is enriched and made strong *by godly contentment*. God tells us how in 1 Timothy 6:7-10.

B. The explanation behind the principle:

1. Focusing on the eternal brings great gain (1 Timothy 6:7)

God said it first: "For dust you are, and to dust you shall return." Job said it next (Job 1:21). Greed for the Christian is irrational.

2. Focusing on the essentials brings great gain (1 Timothy 6:8)

He is richest who desires the least, here meaning the essentials of food and clothing. Whatever we have above these essentials are to be stewarded and enjoyed (Philippians 4:12).

3. Focusing on the entrapment brings great gain (1 Timothy 6:9)

The love of money is a trap—a snare—causing them to sink down into ruin.

4. Focusing on the ending brings great gain (1 Timothy 6:10)

Notice: it is not money that is the root of all evil; it is the *love* of it that is the root of all kinds of evil. Paul is borrowing here from King Solomon, who said this before him (Ecclesiastes 5:10).

CONCLUSION

Let's go to God in prayer and ask Him to help us all resist a covetous godliness, and instead embrace a contented godliness, to be found only by His grace.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Context

- What was the main point of the passage immediately before this week's passage?
- Are there logical or thematic connections to the passage from this week's sermon?

Observation

- Are there any major sub-sections or breaks in the text?
- Are there key connecting words (for, therefore, but, because) that indicate the logical flow of the passage?
- What is the main point or points? What supporting points does the author make?
- What surprises are there in the flow of the argument?

Meaning

- How does this text relate to other parts of the book?
- How does the passage relate to Jesus?
- What does this teach you about God?

Application

- What does this teach you about you?
- How does this passage challenge (or confirm) your understanding?
- Is there some attitude you need to change?
- How does this passage call on you to change the way you live?