Godliness and Contentment
1 Tim 6:6-10

Big Idea: Satisfaction in God and desire for Him leads to a proper view of gain

Read the text & introduction

‘Grab all you can get out of this life.’ ‘Whatever it takes to get ahead in this world’ seems to be the motto of our current age. But of course that is a limited view of history. We often think that what is happening around us is new and never experienced before. But that is usually not the case. The desire to gain riches or status or reputation is a timeless description of man. From the Garden of Eden, there has always been a desire to have what a person does not currently own. This is part of Adam and Eve’s fall from innocence and part of the temptation presented by the serpent. God has withheld from you what you should have. What God has given you is not what you deserve. What you currently possess is not enough. The same smooth, tempting voice has spoken into the delicate, listening ear of men and women from that time onward.

We hear it whispered to us on a daily basis. Why is it that scam emails from supposed Nigerian officials continue to make the rounds? It is because they prey on the base nature of men to gain what they do not have. After all, who doesn’t want a million dollars deposited in their bank account? The legal lottery system plays on the nature of man to get more than he already has – without having to work for it. The same could be said of the casino. The same could be said of the man who abandons his family in order to work longer hours for a better lifestyle that never seems to come.

Operating in every heart – operating in my heart and in your heart – is a desire to have more or different or better than I already have. We naturally think of material things when we think of gain. But I think there are other ways we could naturally apply the concept of wanting more than we have right now. We could apply it in the context of relationships, could we not? If I only had that guy or that girl, then I would be satisfied. If I only this person pay attention to me then all would be well in the world. We could apply the desire for gain in the area of reputation. I want to be better thought of. I have a desire for a certain status and maybe when I get it, I will be satisfied. If I only had this position in life or this position in my company or this position in my school, then I would be content. If I was just the popular girl then I would be content. Operating in every heart is a desire to have more than I already have.

At its most basic, this desire is not necessarily bad or evil. What turns the desire one way or another is what is seen as satisfaction for it. What satisfies your desire for more? I would propose to you that when our desire to gain is pressed in the right direction and toward the right end, when we push into the right satisfaction, then it is a good desire. But when we press our desire toward that which does not last and that which cannot satisfy, it becomes an evil desire.
Paul, in this text, addresses the issue of gain and the desire that undergirds it. Before we study exactly what Paul writes, we need to place it within its context. He has been warning Timothy, and by extension the church in Ephesus, about the danger of false teachers in the church. In the immediate context, Paul has identified several characteristics of these false teachers in order that the church might identify them. The core identifying characteristic is in their doctrine. They have distanced themselves from the ‘sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ’ and promoted a man-centered theology that deviates from the clear teaching of Christ and His apostles. Their doctrine has no focus on the depraved nature of man or the transforming work of Jesus Christ. It doesn’t accord with godliness or point men to holy living based on grace and empowered by the Spirit of God. So their doctrine is ‘different’; it is off-course; it is wrong and it leads to the wrong ends.

A second identifying mark of these false teachers is found in their character. They are proud and puffed up with conceit. They crave controversy and argue over minutia. The fixate on minor issues. And their teaching doesn’t lead to the exhibit of the fruit of the Spirit but to dissension and slander and conflict.

And notice in 6:5 the way they view religion. Paul says they imagine that godliness is a means of gain. They see religion as a pathway to getting rich. There is financial advancement through religion.

It is at that point that we pick up with Paul’s corrective word to us in 6:6. If you want to summarize what is said here, I think we can do it this way: if you are looking for gain then there is a gain to be had but it isn’t in the place you are thinking. Godliness with contentment is a great gain and it is a safeguard for your soul. True godliness and biblical contentment work together to satisfy the heart and to safeguard the soul.

Let me show you how that is worked out in the text.

I. Godliness with contentment is a great gain (6-8)

First, Paul says there is a gain to be had in true godliness and biblical contentment but it isn’t the financial gain that these false teachers are promoting. There is something to be gained but it isn’t the gain that most of us are thinking about or seeking. Instead, there is something high and deeper and utterly more satisfying. Listen, whatever it is that you think will bring you contentment in this life, if it is sourced or rooted in the wrong place then it will only bring you emptiness, disappointment, discontentment.

So Paul points us to two complementary tracks to real gain in life – the track of godliness and the track of contentment. Let me break those down for you and show you the connection here.

First, the track of godliness. We have been talking about godliness repeatedly as we have studied this epistle. Paul uses godliness as a description for a life that is being transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. It is a synonym for holiness and Christ-
likeness. In other words, when we talk about someone being godly we are saying they are possessing the character and nature of Jesus. And Paul here says that it is better to have godliness than anything else. There is no better objective in life than to be like Christ and to have our lives be a mirror reflecting Jesus in everything we value and hold dear.

Jesus’ rhetorical question drives the point - “What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and yet loses his soul?” There is no profit there. That is a lose-lose equation. If you could gain everything that you think would satisfy you in this world but lose the one thing that has eternal satisfaction, then you have lost twice. The world cannot satisfy even if you have it. The things of this world never bring about contentment. They are like cotton candy – fluffy and big but empty. If you lose your soul and yet have the whole world then you have lost everything. But if you have Jesus, if you have a life that has been transformed by God and is being continually transformed into the godly character of Christ, then you have everything. “Godliness is of value for the present life and also for the life to come” (1 Tim 4:8). Therefore, drive your life in the direction of godliness.

Let me ask you friend, what would you give to be like Jesus? Really. What would you be willing to give in order that your heart might be more like Jesus’ heart? Would you give up everything else in your life for this? Isn’t that the point of the parable of the pearl of great price? A man who trades in pearls has been on the hunt for the greatest pearl of them all. His whole life has been looking for it and when he finds it, he sells everything he has – all of the other pearls he has collected are sold at auction – and he goes and buys this one pearl. (Mt 13:45)

What will drive you and I to see Jesus this way? What will drive you to value being like Jesus in this way? Let me let you in on a little secret that really isn’t a secret. It is only when we consider the supreme value to the object desired that we are willing to give up lesser objectives! How we value something or someone is directly proportional to our pursuit of it. Value little = pursue little. Value much = pursue much.

I’ll give you a pretty poor illustration compared to the subject we are talking about. But when I met Kellie it seemed like my world had suddenly shrunk down to one objective – her. Sleep, which is a prime objective for any young man, went to the wayside. Work was tolerated just so I could spend time with her. Friends were less of a priority. Money, what little money I had, was useful only because it allowed me to be with Kellie.

Brothers and sisters, the value we place on godliness will directly drive our pursuit of it. If we value being like Jesus a little, then we will give it little priority. Far too many of us acknowledge the importance of Christ-likeness but do not value it enough to pursue it above all else. We are like the Israelites in the wilderness who would enter into slavery again for some leeks and garlic, all the while the Promised Land, full of riches and infinitely more satisfying was theirs if they would only enter into it.

Pursue Jesus and you will never be disappointed. Pursue anything else and you will come up empty and wanting; disappointed and discontent.
Now Paul combines this pursuit of Christ with biblical contentment. Godliness with contentment is great gain. How should we define contentment? Let me suggest just one way of defining it. Contentment is satisfaction. It is resting in something and being satisfied with it. A.W. Pink gives this definition – “Contentment is the product of a heart resting in God. It is the soul’s enjoyment of that peace that passes all understanding.”

Contentment is operative in the heart when the heart says that God is good and all that comes to me in my life comes from the hand of my good God and therefore I will be satisfied. That is biblical contentment – biblical satisfaction. You see friends, there is a contentment that the world says you can have. You get enough for yourself – whatever that enough is – and then you can be content. In other words, I have reached a state in which I have all that I want. That might be worldly contentment but it is not biblical contentment. Biblical contentment says that all I have and all that I do not have come from the gracious hand of God and therefore I am satisfied. Satisfaction comes not because of whatever state I am in, but because of God who is my satisfaction.

That is the driving theme of one of our favorite hymns by Horatio Spafford.

When peace like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to know,
it is well, it is well, with my soul.

So when all is going well – contentment. When all is lost – contentment. That is biblical satisfaction because biblical contentment is rooted in Jesus and not in what is given or withheld. You need to grab hold of this brothers and sisters. Far too many of us have been infected with the views of this world and far too few of us have come to grips with what it means to be satisfied in Jesus alone.

Jeremiah Burroughs was an English pastor in the early 1600’s. One of his better-known publications is titled The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment. He writes this, “Christian contentment is that sweet inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit which freely submits to and delights in God’s wise and fatherly disposal in every condition.” In every condition. In every condition. When cancer strikes there is contentment. When financial gain is our lot, there is contentment. When death takes away the hopes we had built our lives upon, there is contentment. Why? Because we learn to submit to and delight in God’s wise and fatherly disposal in every condition.

You see, I think what you are looking for in your life is a desire to be satisfied. You are seeking out satisfaction. But you are looking in the wrong places for it. You are looking to finances to satisfy you. Maybe when you were younger you thought if I only had $500 a month, I would be good. And now if I only had $500 more a month then I

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1 A. W. Pink, Comfort for Christians
would be satisfied. But no matter what you have, it doesn’t seem to meet the deep need of your soul. Some of you are looking for a husband or a wife or a girlfriend or just a friend to satisfy you. But they never will and they never can. Relationships with other people – although good and necessary and right – can never bring contentment.

The reason you never have contentment is not because you do not have these things of the world or that you don’t have enough of them but that they are incapable of satisfying a soul that can only be satisfied in God Himself. St Augustine says the human heart is restless until it finds its rest in God. Therefore if you are going to be content in this life, it is going to be because you have pursued and found rest in Jesus alone.

And when you do that, then you are able to say what Paul says here – I brought nothing into this world and I will bring nothing out of it. You can say what Job says in the face of trial – “naked I came into the world and naked I will leave it. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.” (Job 1:21) I can be content in whatever situation God places me. When I have the bare necessities of life, I am content. The question is not much or little but an issue of focal point. Where are your eyes focused? What or whom are you looking to?

You see friend, Paul can say that if he has food and clothing then he can be content because he realizes that even these things are a gracious gift of God. Paul isn’t being a minimalist. In other words sell everything you have and only possess the cloths on your back. That isn’t what Paul is saying. What he is driving at is that we don’t even deserve food and clothing. I came into this world naked and helpless. Anything I have now, I have from the merciful hand of God. And when I leave this world, I will bring none of it with me. Go ahead and put gold coins in the casket with you when you are dead and they will do you no good. One day someone will dig you up, just like they have done with the Pharaohs of Egypt and all your treasure will belong to someone else.

So both godliness and contentment work together toward the same end. They both point us to the one place that satisfies – Jesus Christ. They point us away from seeking to gain in this world and seeking satisfaction from it.

The question I think then comes back to how do we get there. You might be thinking to yourself: “Pastor, I struggle with contentment. I want to be content but I’m not. So help me work this out. Help me grow in contentment.”

First, let me just say welcome to the club. I am a fellow pilgrim in this area and so we are journeying to greater contentment together. There is nothing to humble your soul as to
study all week on biblical contentment and realize the depth of discontentedness you struggle with. It has been a painful but good week.

So for both of our benefits, here are a couple of ways that you and I can move forward in finding great gain in godliness and contentment. I have culled these from a little book written by Thomas Watson, titled The Divine Art of Contentment. If you struggle with contentment, then I recommend this book to you. If you don’t struggle with contentment, I recommend it to you because it might just open your eyes a little bit to what is going on in your heart.

Here are 3 ways to work toward greater contentment in your life.

1. **Pursue faith.**

All our issues with contentment come from unbelief. It is this that raises the storm of discontent in our hearts. Faith works the heart toward a sweet, serene composure. That doesn’t come from having food and clothing but having faith in Christ that will lead us to contentment.

Faith shows the soul that whatever its trials are, yet it is from the hand of a Father. It is indeed a bitter cup, but ‘shall I not drink the cup which my Father has given me?’ It is in love for my soul, faith shows me, that God corrects with the same love with which He crowns me.

Faith sucks the honey of contentment out of the hive of the promise. Christ is the vine; the promises are the clusters of grapes that grow upon the vine; and faith presses the sweet vine of contentment out of these spiritual clusters of the promises.

So **pursue faith.** Lift your eyes up to the hills and look toward Christ.

2. **Pursue humility.**

The humble man is the content man. If our condition is a low one, we can live with it because we know we deserve even lower. If others look down on us, the person who is little in his own eyes will not be troubled much to be thought of as low in the eyes of others.

The humble man or woman does not say that their comfort in this life is small but that their sins are great. They think it is a mercy that they are out of hell; therefore he is content. He does not go to carve out for himself a happier condition; he knows the worst piece God cuts him is better than he deserves.

**Pursue humility.**
3. Pursue the right type of comparison

We are quick to compare ourselves and our condition to others. This is what drives keeping up with the Jones’ syndrome. Let us compare ourselves rightly. If you are going to compare, then compare yourself this way:

a. compare your situation with what you deserve. If you don’t have what you desire, remember that you have more than you deserve. You deserve less mercy. You deserve more affliction. We live on free grace and nothing more. The very least bit of bread is more than God owes us. The person who has the very least mercies will still die in God’s debt.

Consider friend that the mercies given to you are more than you deserve and the afflictions you experience are less than you deserve. Ezra 9:13, “You have punished us less than our iniquities deserve.” Is your condition sad? You deserve a worse one. Has God taken away your possessions? He might have taken Christ away. Has He throw you into prison? He might have thrown you into hell. He might as well damn us as whip us. This should drive us to be content.

b. Compare your situation to what Christ experienced and be content. “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, for your sakes he became poor.” (2 Cor 8:9) What did Christ experience in this world? He could have brought all the glories of heaven when he came. But instead, he lived in the lowest of states while on the earth. He was born in poverty. He didn’t live in palaces. Birds have nests and the foxes their holes, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. And yet Jesus was the most content of men.

If your Master experienced life in this manner, can you not be content with what he has given to you?

c. Compare your present condition to what it used to be. Not in the material realm. Not in the material realm but in the spiritual. Remember where you were when Christ found you. Dead in your sins and trespasses. Like a stillborn infant – outside of hope; outside of life. And yet now He has not only given you life but life eternal. Has he not enriched you in grace? Has He not enriched you with His Spirit? Has He not enriched you with mercies beyond compare?

Remember friend where you once were and what Christ has done for you.

Pursue the right comparisons.
Are you looking for gain? I hope so. I hope you are seeking gain in your pursuit of Christ and satisfaction in Christ. *Let us pray that God develop in us the blessed grace of godliness and biblical contentment.*

Pray