

Godliness With Contentment – Part 1

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – Paul instructs Timothy regarding the importance of contentment in godliness
2. aim – to cause us to understand that contentment is an important characteristic of godliness
3. passage – 1 Timothy 6:1-10

b. outline

1. Contentment for Slaves (1 Timothy 6:1-2a)
2. Contentment as a Doctrinal Matter (1 Timothy 6:2b-5)
3. Contentment in Financial Matters (1 Timothy 6:6-10)

c. opening

1. **remember:** preaching *systematically* means running into passages that are difficult to interpret, difficult to apply, or difficult to deal with *personally* (because they speak to *me* as the preacher)
 - a. here: a passage that is 1) difficult to ascertain *where it belongs* and 2) difficult to preach in our current *highly sensitive* and *easily offended* culture
2. **question:** where does **1 Timothy 6:1-2a** belong in the flow of the letter up to this point?
 - a. does it belong to the thought we have just been looking at (**i.e.** honoring those who rule well)?
 1. it is included in the previous ESV section ending in the middle of **v. 2**
 2. it does make reference to a form of “leadership” (**i.e.** masters)
 3. it does use the word “*honor*” in **v. 1** to describe how masters are to be treated
 - b. or, does it belong to the thought that we *will* be looking at (**i.e.** a new concept introduced)
 1. it moves to “leadership” *outside* of the church (**i.e.** moving away from elders, specifically)
 2. it moves from how the *leaders* are to act to how the *subordinates* are to act (**i.e.** it is not addressed specifically to the behavior of “*masters*,” but to the behavior of “*slaves*”)
 3. it seems that although Paul is still (to some extent) considering the role of leadership, another thought begins to form in his mind, which is where he turns next
 - c. thus, it would *appear* that these two verses are a *transition* between one thought and another
 1. as though Paul was thinking along the lines of leaders (elders), came up with another example (masters), and then thought about something specific *from the new example* to focus on next
 - d. so, we will “move” **vv. 1-2a** to the next section – and we will incorporate the *new concept* into them
3. **thesis: contentment is a vital characteristic of godliness – to be godly is to have a strong sense of contentment in the circumstances God has ordained over you (note v. 6)**
 - a. **godliness** = an understanding and respect of God that affects the way a person lives; a sense of reverence for God that works itself out in a life of piety and devotion; a strong sense of the holiness of God that causes one to want to “imitate” him in all of life (**i.e.** the nature of being *godly*)
 1. **remember:** the entire book of **1 Timothy** is written as a command by Paul for believers to pursue a life of godliness – a life dedicated to the *real* purpose of the gospel
 - b. **contentment** = a sense of mental or emotional satisfaction drawn from being at ease in one’s current situation; finding “comfort” regardless of one’s present or anticipated circumstances
 1. **IOW:** believing that your current situation is adequate or sufficient; accepting whatever has been ordained over you by God as though it is “just fine”
 - c. Paul will insist that a *correct* definition of godliness must include a strong sense of contentment – to truly understand and respect God is to recognize his *sovereignty* over the circumstances of life, and *choose* to be content in them
 1. **note from vv. 1-10:** it is a *lack of contentment* that leads many to pursue false doctrines, unhealthy emotional cravings, strivings after “*gain*,” greed and (ultimately) apostasy

I. Contentment for Slaves (1 Timothy 6:1-2a)

Content

a. the concept of the Christian slave

1. the **concern** of the use of “*bondservant*” in this passage (**an issue worth repeating from Eph. 6**)
 - a. *doulos* = lit. a slave; someone serving *under the will* (or mastery) of another
 1. it is a word used **x126** in the N.T. – it has a *strong descriptive* value

2. Paul introduces himself with the word in **Romans, Philippians, and Titus**
 - b. but, because this word has such *negative* connotations in American culture, some translations (e.g. ESV) “mask” it by using lesser terms like “servant” or “bondservant” based on context
 1. i.e. the alternative terms represent a more “servant-like” position, even as one “bonded”
 2. true, the ESV does use the term “slave” when the translators feel that the term applies, but to “lessen” the term in certain places (because of its connection with 18th-19th C. chattel slavery) leaves the impression that some forms of “slavery” can be considered less than others
 - c. **IMO:** to lessen the term “slave” in the Christian lexicon, because of its non-PC nature, is to *diminish* the value of the gospel itself (i.e. this word is *essential* to understanding the gospel)
 1. it is to diminish the relationship that human beings have with sin (at the opening of the gospel)
 - a. to preach that humans are sinful (up to a point) or are simply “missing the mark” or “failing to reach their potential” over against the *absolute sway* sin holds over mankind (**John 8:34**)
“Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.”
 - b. because of the Curse, human beings are *enslaved* by sin; owned by its power; they must “obey” their nature as fallen and rebellious
 - c. **the message of the gospel is only truly freeing if it understands this enslavement**
 2. it is to diminish the relationship that believers have with Christ (at the heart of the gospel)
 - a. to preach that believers simply “ask Jesus into their heart” or “pray the prayer” over against the *absolute commitment* that faith in Christ demands (**Mark 8:34-35**)
“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.”
 - b. in faith, the believer is “owned” by Christ, and now lives under an absolute allegiance to him, obeying his commands and doing his will *in all things*
 - c. **the message of the gospel is only truly saving if it understands this enslavement**
 3. it is to diminish the unifying nature of all who are now reconciled to Christ *and with one another*
 - a. to avoid *biblical terms* because they are “offensive,” or to create new “categories” of relationship *in the church* based on artificial distinctions is to gut the gospel of its message
 - b. the gospel doesn’t eliminate the *natural* distinctions between us – rather, it *redeems* those distinctions as all who believe in Christ come to the cross to be saved *by grace alone*
 1. **note:** in **Eph. 6** Paul primarily instructs *masters*, here Paul primarily instructs *slaves* – it is clear that Paul believed that *both classes could coincide in the church*
 - c. **the message of the gospel is only truly unifying if it is based on grace, not on race**
 - d. slavery was a *very common* reality in the days of Jesus and Paul – some estimate that >60% of the population of the empire was enslaved in one form or another
 1. thus, it is *obvious* that the church at Ephesus was made up of many who were slaves
 - e. however, slavery in the Roman Empire was much more *nuanced* than it was in our 18th-19th C.
 1. **category #1:** *involuntary* slavery – conquered peoples, criminals, and others deemed fit to be enslaved for a judicial or economic purpose (e.g. Onesimus)
 2. **category #2:** *voluntary* slavery – the willing choice by a person to “put” themselves under the mastery of another, primarily for the purpose of paying off a financial debt or obligation (e.g. the *Parable of the Unforgiving Servant*, **Matthew 18:23-35**)
 3. **category #3:** *simple employment* – submission to others with direct control over aspects of one’s life, particularly from a work or financial perspective (i.e. employers or creditors)
 - a. so, Paul’s words apply to us as we fall under the mastery of those for whom we work
- b. the command to the Christian slave**
1. the **command** to the “bondservant” in this passage
 - a. slaves are to treat their masters with “honor” (v. 1) and respect (v. 2; i.e. not “disrespectful”)
 1. a sense of faithfulness and submission that causes the slave to work in a way that characterizes his view of God and his understanding of the message of the church
 2. **IOW:** the application of a **Christian worldview** in relation to others with power over us
 - a. to work obediently, with diligence, with patience, with a sense of respect for those over us
 2. the *reasons* the “bondservant” is to act in this manner:
 - a. so that the “name of God” is not reviled = that an unbelieving master sees the nature of God through the attitude and efforts of the believing slave
 1. **remember:** it is the *name* of God that encapsulates his nature; all of his attributes are subsumed under his name (i.e. his holiness, his majesty, his sovereignty, his power, etc.)
 2. thus, when a slave gives his master honor and respect through his work, the master “sees” the nature of God manifested in the slave – it becomes a *testimony* to godliness (**Matt. 5:16**)
“In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

- b. so that the *“teaching”* is not reviled = that an unbelieving master sees the consistency of the gospel in the life of the slave – the willingness to endure the *temporary* hardships of this world in anticipation of the *greater kingdom to come*
 - 1. the message of the church (in this context) = we belong to another kingdom and another master; how we respond to our earthly masters reflects how we respond to the real Master
 - 2. **principle: believers are to submit to their masters and do their jobs in such a way that, through it, they demonstrate godliness – their actions demonstrate contentment with their circumstances in anticipation of so much more**
- c. so that the relationship of *“brothers”* is maintained – that a *believing* master can maintain a *family relationship* with the believing slave – that the *temporal* realities of this master/slave relationship does not destroy the *higher* connection they have in Christ
 - 1. Paul assumes here that there were such situations amongst the people at Ephesus
 - 2. a principle established by Paul for Philemon and Onesimus (**Philemon 15**)
“For this perhaps is why [Onesimus] was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.”
 - 3. **IOW:** the believing slave is to work *all the harder* for a believing master because they are brothers in Christ – their relationship is *unified* in Christ, as both are saved by the grace of God, and **their class distinction can never be a matter of disunity or disharmony**