

True Christian Contentment

I Timothy 6:3-6

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Note: The text below was prepared for oral delivery rather than for publication in print. As such, be aware that sentence fragments are intentionally used and that this document has not been edited to correct the errors in grammar, sentence structure, etc.

- I. **Introduction:** Our text for today is taken from I Timothy, chapter 6. The idea for today's message came from a book I've been reading concerning various aspects of Christian worship. And in one section, verses 5 and 6 of I Timothy 6 were cited. In verse 5, as inspired by God the Holy Spirit, Paul warns Timothy of men, "...**destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness:** <adding...> **from such withdraw thyself.**" I.e. – stay away from them. And then immediately in the following verse he adds, "**But godliness with contentment is great gain.**" Well that contrast concerning "godliness" stirred up my curiosity as I hope it does yours. What is meant by these 2 phrases? (1) Paul says, "Stay away from those that suppose "...**gain is godliness.**" Withdraw from them. Clearly then to suppose that "...**gain is godliness...**" is bad – evil in God's sight. But he immediately makes a contrast by saying (2) "**But godliness with contentment is great gain**" – that means it's good for you. I wanted to understand this better which prompted further study and as a result I came to see that "...**godliness with contentment**" describes the contentment of every true Christian. And so I've titled today's message "True Christian Contentment." This speaks of a contentment with which every true Christian should be able to identify.
- II. **Broader Context:** Now most of my focus today will be on verses 3-6; however, to see that in its broader context, let's read the first 12 verses, beginning in verse 1: "**Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that <or so that> the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed.** <In other words, don't let your behavior in this matter give others an excuse to speak against your Gospel doctrine. And then in verse 2 concerning these master / servant relationships (which we can apply to our current day employer/employee relationships) he adds...> ²**And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort.**
- <And then, beginning in verse 3, Paul instructs Timothy to reject false doctrines>. ³**If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness;** <This includes the doctrine of Christ – the Gospel that promotes true godliness in our hearts and lives. And in verse 4 he is saying of any who teach contrary to it, that...> ⁴**He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words,** <In other words he doesn't know what he is talking about> **whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings,**

⁵***Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth,*** <Totally lacking the truth of Christ, who is the truth, knowing nothing of Him savingly; and of the Gospel, the word of truth. And then he describes them as...> ***supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.*** ⁶***But godliness with contentment is great gain.*** <We will revisit this in more detail but for now, let's continue on through verse 12.

Verse 7...> ⁷***For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.*** <This reminds me of a story (one I suspect some you may have heard as well) of 2 fellows attending the funeral of a man they knew to have been very wealthy. One of them, curious as to just how rich the fellow might have been, asked the other, "How much do you reckon he left behind?" His friend simply replied, "All of it." That pretty sums it up doesn't it? We don't take any of it with us. And so Paul says in verse 8...? ⁸***And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.*** <"Raiment" here means covering which would include clothes and shelter – in essence the necessities of life.>

⁹***But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.*** <That refers to their utter ruin.> ¹⁰***For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*** <"pierced" – that reminds me of the "thorny-ground" hearer in the Parable of the Sower who Christ described as one who heard the word, but that the care of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choked the word so that he became unfruitful (Matt. 13:22). Notice the wording in verses 9 and 10. He's not referring to the rich but rather to "they that will be rich," referring to those seeking riches at any cost. In verse 10, he doesn't say that money is the root of all evil, but rather the love of money. So this is speaking of an insatiable desire or an inordinate love for worldly riches which would lead them away, taking priority over love for (and trust in) God and His Gospel.

Verse 11...> ¹¹***But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.*** ¹²***Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.*** Lay hold on eternal life – Don't allow the primary focus of your life to be on that which is temporal and only lasts for the sliver of time which makes up this brief lifespan – a tiny sliver when compared with the vastness of the never-ending eternity we have to spend.

III. Godliness: Now this broader context certainly aids in our understanding of what Paul means in verses 5 and 6. This is particularly true of verse 5 where he says to stay away from those who suppose "...***gain is godliness.***" Consider the verses we read following that, teaching us, "You can't take it with you," "Be content with the necessities of life," that "The love of money is the root of all evil," etc.

So understandably, most agree that this description in verse 5 certainly would apply to preachers or others who make a profession of godliness for their own monetary gain (either now or in the future). It can also apply to seeking the gain of an enhanced reputation, or to gain a following, or to garner more respect from others. I've personally known men who openly admit having chosen to join large, prominent churches in the community for the purpose of furthering their career or business interests. And clearly, such ungodly motives are set in contrast with those who are truly godly – i.e. – those who exercise godliness with contentment – which would include being content with the necessities of life (as we read) so as to not covet the treasures of this world to an extent it would cause them to neglect true worship or prompt them to participate in religion with a mercenary motive of gain. And I agree this is part of what is being taught here in 1 Timothy 6.

Also those who suppose “gain is godliness” would include folks who have been blessed with some measure of temporal prosperity in this world and on that basis mistakenly conclude God's spiritual blessings must be upon them as well, thinking their temporal blessings (or gain) to be evidence of their right relationship with God – their godliness. We've all heard folks suggest when things are going well for someone, “Why they must living at the foot of the cross!” But the Bible does not teach that kind of reasoning! No – God causes it to rain on the just and the unjust.

Now let's dig a little further into this. The Greek word translated “godliness” is a compound word that means “good worship” or “good reverence.” It refers to God-fearing worship – a heart attitude toward God which affects our conduct and our worship. I counted either 15 or 16 times in which this word translated “godliness” is found in the New Testament and 4 of these are right here in 1 Timothy chapter 6. So, as you can observe just from our own text today, its meaning is most often defined by its context.

I found it interesting that other translations of the bible, qualify the “godliness” of verse 6 by inserting the word “true” so as to have it read, “***But true godliness with contentment is great gain.***” And that seems appropriate with the contrast made here between what is mistakenly presumed to be godliness in verse 5 (but isn't) with the true godliness of verse 6. True godliness would denote the worship of God in Spirit and in truth.

Over in 2 Timothy 3:5-7 I believe Paul was describing those who suppose “gain to be godliness” where he spoke of them as, “***Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.*** ⁶***For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts,*** ⁷***Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.***” That coincides with the description in our text of their being “destitute of the truth.” So we see that true “godliness” is vitally connected to (and inseparable from) Gospel truth. (Repeat).

In surveying the usage of this word, I found that it is sometimes used for doctrine as we saw in verse 3, ***“the doctrine which is according to godliness”*** –that means the good worship connected with Gospel truth. We often quote from I Timothy 3:16 where it reads, ***“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: <And what is that mystery? He tells us...>God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.”*** So we see that this mystery of godliness respects the Person, office, and grace of Christ and salvation by Him, the crucified and risen Savior. Often when we speak of “the mystery of godliness,” we tend to emphasize the unique Person of Christ in His incarnation as the God-man. But vitally connected to that is the purpose for which He came into this world. In 1 Timothy 1:15, we’re told, ***“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.”*** So this mystery of godliness includes His incarnation (His Person as God-man) but that is not to be separated from His finished work of redemption on Calvary’s cross, His subsequent resurrection, and the sure and certain application by the Spirit of everything that Christ purchased for His people. Clearly, that’s why He became incarnate, why He came into the world – not to try to save sinners, not to merely make salvation possible – but to save them! Just as Paul told Timothy here, the angel communicated the same to Joseph, instructing him to name the Christ child, Jesus (Jehovah God who saves), adding, ***“...for he shall save his people from their sins.”*** (Matthew 1:21). So again – see how true “godliness” (good worship, God-fearing worship) is inseparable from belief of the Gospel – the truth concerning how God saves sinners in and by Jesus Christ, the God-man, and Him alone.

As you can see, an accurate understanding of the various usages of the word “godliness” is derived in large part from the context. Sometimes the word is used to signify a Christian’s proper conduct under the gracious influence and power of the Holy Spirit. Other places it refers to a particular duty of religion or some particular grace. And we could go on. But for our consideration of true “godliness” as found in verse 6 of our text today, I think John Gill’s summary of it applies. He called it the “holy disposition of the soul towards God, a God-ward disposition.” And this is in sharp contrast to its antithesis, man’s natural disposition towards man, a man-ward disposition. I’m speaking of 2 different frames of reference. By nature, we focus man-ward, pondering questions such as “What must I do to be saved?” Or “Have I (or have you) accepted Jesus?” when the real question should be focused God-ward, “How can a holy and just God accept me, a sinner?”

Godliness is the worship of God in truth. In 2 Peter 1:2-3, Peter wrote to those of like faith saying, ***“Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, ³According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:”***

Again, we see how right worship involves knowledge – knowing God as He is, Him whom to know is life eternal. And true believers have been given all things that pertain unto life and godliness. So that which pertains unto godliness has to include God-given faith and repentance, hope, love, and every other grace of the Spirit. In salvation, sinners are given that by which they can worship aright in godliness. This godliness is not a product of our own making but the fruits of the Holy Spirit, given to us in Christ Jesus.

So we've reviewed the clear contrast made here between those for whom true "godliness with contentment" is indeed great gain as opposed to those who (a) make a profession of worshipping aright but who do so for their own worldly gain or (b) who mistakenly take comfort in their spiritual state based upon having prospered in this life. But now let's also consider the many others, who unlike these, approach worship with little to no consideration of their own temporal wealth and well-being, but who (in a different sense) may also be said to suppose "gain to be godliness." Now these sincerely believe their worship to be good. And I can identify with this group for I too once thought that my "salvation" (listen—a salvation which I presumed to have gained for myself) resulted in my good and acceptable worship.

And I believe this is in keeping with the context as well. Remember now how Paul began chapter 6 encouraging proper conduct so that the doctrine of God (which would include the Gospel) would not be blasphemed by others. Then he warned about those who taught contrary to "**...the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness;**" From the passages we've considered, we know this to be the Gospel of God's free and sovereign grace in Christ.

In keeping with those 2 frames of references I mentioned – a man-ward disposition versus a God-ward disposition – consider that despite all the differences of the many religions of the world, they all fall into 1 of 2 categories: 1) A man-ward disposition, the false religion of works or 2) A God-ward disposition, the one true religion of grace. The Bible makes it clear that those who will gain the eternal riches of glory (great gain – riches far beyond anything this world has to offer) are those whom God has saved by His grace. (Quote Eph. 2:8-9). They embrace the doctrine of Christ, seeing all of the conditions for their salvation having been fully met by the doing and dying of Christ, their Substitute and Surety, whereby they are accepted in the beloved (in the Lord Jesus Christ). That's grace.

Believers saved by grace actually possess (by God's gracious imputation) the entire merit of the obedience unto death of the spotless Lamb of God – great gain. Being one with Christ, they have His perfect righteousness that was rendered in full satisfaction to the law and justice of God, graciously and freely imputed to them (accounted unto them) just as their sin-debt was paid in full based upon that same principle...

– the demerit of their sins having been imputed to (or placed to the account of) their sinless Substitute so that He might bear the just penalty due unto them. That’s the glorious exchange described in 2 Corinthians 5:21. And the only One who could (the God-man), did in fact pay that sin-debt in full for the full remission or forgiveness of the sins for everyone for whom He lived and died. And true believers are content (satisfied) with that because that satisfied God, as evidenced by His resurrection. Just as sin demands death, righteousness demands life. True godliness with that contentment that I just described, truly is great gain!

Now there is no mixture of these 2 religions (grace and works) as we’re taught from Romans 11. Right now (if you’re religious at all), you’re practicing either the religion of works or the religion of grace – one or the other, no in-between. So those who are “destitute of the truth,” who are said to suppose “gain to be godliness,” would include those who approach God for acceptance based on the false religion of works, imagining their salvation (at least in part or to some degree) to be gained by something done by and/or through them – destitute of the truth of salvation by God’s grace in Christ alone.

To believe in salvation by the will and /or works of men is to vainly imagine that your determined efforts or decision to gain salvation for yourself does accomplish just that. And so many (like myself in years past) who wrongly presumed to be saved by something they’ve done or some decision they’ve made, do sincerely worship – but it’s an idol of their imagination worshipped under a false gospel. Like me, they may be sincere. But tragically, they are sincerely wrong. Being so deceived in spiritual blindness, they may well believe their worship to be “good worship.” Sadly, I once thought the same, but rejoice with me if, like me, God has delivered you from that blindness (given you spiritual eyes to see) and caused you to withdraw from such as you turned to Christ for all salvation.

It’s truly sad that so many (including many who worship under the banner of so-called “Christianity”) suppose that gain is godliness in that sense. But in contrast, what wonderful news for believers to discover that true godliness with contentment was purchased for them. I know I’m not always as mindful as I should be of how marvelous and great this gain is, but let’s ponder that some this morning – how wonderfully blessed are all who have been given that blood-bought gift of faith and repentance, along with all the other fruits of the Spirit whereby we can and do worship God aright.

IV. Godliness with Contentment: “...with contentment” Think about that.

First, in light of the broader context, this certainly could tie in with being content with having the basic necessities of life (the portion God has blessed us with) so that (by God's grace) we aren't plagued with an inordinate, covetous desire for worldly gain or riches to an extent that would draw us away from worshipping around the true Gospel. But this contentment can also be understood to our being content with, or satisfied with that which satisfies God. The word translated "contentment" means fulfilled, sufficient or satisfied. Recall how the Prophet Isaiah said, "**He** <God the Father> **shall see of the travail of his soul**, <the suffering unto death of the promised Messiah> **and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.**" (Isaiah 53:11).

When Paul speaks of true godliness with contentment being great gain, he is not suggesting that if we will develop an attitude of contentment and add that to our good worship, then we will find great gain as a result of our determined efforts to be content. The truth is, that because of remaining sin, no matter how determined we may be, we will struggle with being content with the various temporal circumstances that we endure during our lifetimes. But there is a spiritual contentment, true Christian contentment, given that is the foundation upon which believers strive to be content with food and raiment or whatever temporal circumstances they face.

Paul is not talking about godliness plus a contentment that we muster up. No – there is no true godliness apart from this spiritual contentment – our being satisfied with that which satisfies the Judge of all – the righteousness established by the Savior through His obedience unto death, the travail of His soul. Does that suffice for you? When it comes to your hope for eternal life, are you content with the doing and dying of Jesus Christ and the righteousness Christ thereby established being imputed to you as your sole ground of your salvation? Is that enough for you? As Paul told true believers in Colossians 2:10a, "**...ye are complete in him.**" He put an end to sin. He finished the transgression! He is fully sufficient, and believers find contentment there.

But those who insist that there remains something to be done (or some decision to be made) by the sinner in order for them be saved, who are taught (and buy into) the popular lie that "God has done His part," or "Christ has made it all possible, but now the rest is left to you," they thereby expose a discontentment, an insufficiency in that God-dishonoring view of Jesus Christ and His work of redemption. In fact, that would be no redemption at all. To many, His doing and dying just didn't quite get the job done. It was insufficient, showing a discontentment in believing that His precious blood is not enough. My – think of the dishonor that casts upon our Lord and Savior!

V. Closing: Well my prayer is that you find Christ to be all sufficient when it comes to your hope for eternal life. The only true “godliness” (good worship under the one true Gospel of grace) is this “godliness with contentment.” And this contentment always accompanies true godliness because it is spiritual fruit, just like God-given faith in the Gospel – in the doctrine that is according to godliness. And this “godliness with contentment” is indeed great gain! Think a moment with me about that!

Great Gain: If God has so brought you to worship him aright, given you this “godliness with contentment” then here’s the gain: That means that you possess the satisfying, durable, and unsearchable riches of grace. It is truly profitable because it means all your debts are paid. You’re spiritually rich! It’s to be richly clothed, and deliciously fed, and to be in a good family, even the household of God – you, adopted children, who previously presumed to owe a debt to God’s justice that you really had no hope of being able to pay. What gain for those whose debts are freely forgiven, who were as others (the children of wrath) by nature, appearing to be arrayed in rags with nothing to cover their naked souls from the just wrath of God, but who came to discover that how they have been clothed with a change of raiment. We read that we’re to be content with food and raiment. Well true believers have a raiment with which they shall be eternally content. It’s none other than the robe of God’s imputed righteousness – the garments of salvation.

These who were spiritually starving discover they are actually heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ, and so they have the God-given right and suitableness for the heavenly inheritance – all because His righteousness has been made theirs. They are made kings and priests to God.

And even now, in their present lifetimes, they have God to be their portion, and exceeding great reward. They’ve been given an interest in Christ, and in all spiritual blessings in Him. And they have the Holy Spirit as the earnest of their certain-to-be future inheritance. They are rich in faith, and in good works. Their souls, which were lost, have been found by the Good Shepherd and brought into the fold. They have been and shall be saved with an everlasting salvation. And when this little sliver of time on earth has passed for them, they come to possess all the riches of glory, this incorruptible inheritance, in heaven’s eternal bliss – that’s forever and ever. Believers have all grace here and all glory hereafter! How great is the gain of godliness with contentment!

True Christian contentment, as Paul wrote in Philippians 3:9, is to “***...be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith <or faithfulness> of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:***” I pray you find your contentment there as well.

Footnote from the author: While this sermon was prepared and delivered by me, I often utilize the commentaries, study helps, and teachings of others to supplement my own prayerful study of the scriptures. Since this document was not originally prepared for publication in print, please excuse and recognize that it was unfeasible to properly identify and credit all of the various original sources used to develop the content herein. Ultimately, it is my sincere and foremost objective to accurately present the gospel of God's grace found in the only infallible source, God's word itself – the Bible.

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