

Money's Proper Place

I Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19 (NIV)

⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. ⁹ Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. ¹⁷ Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. ¹⁸ Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. ¹⁹ In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

True or false: money is the root of all kinds of evil? From our second Bible reading today we heard: “For the *love* of money is a root of all kinds of evil.” (verse 10) It is an often misquoted Bible passage. Money, in and of itself, is not evil or sinful; but the attitude associated with money can lead people into sin, and far worse – losing their faith in Jesus and thus their salvation. For the next 3 weeks, the topic of money is going to weave throughout our Bible readings. For today, we want to assess our attitude toward money, and adjust it based on what God tells us in his Word.

Paul wrote to the young pastor Timothy: “Godliness with contentment is great gain.” (verse 6) To begin assessing our attitude towards money, we ask ourselves: Am I content, satisfied, with what I have? You have clothes. You have food. You have Jesus. What more do you need? Paul says, “If we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.” (verse 8) Are we?

If we linger on the contentment question, do you start to think about your clothes, that they’re fine and all but that you could use a few things updated? Although your belly isn’t rumbling, do realize that you don’t want just any food, but good, yummy, tasty, flavorful food? Do you think: “Yeah, I’m content with water – as long as it is ice cold or, actually, I get bored with it and could really go for something with more flavor.”? Does your mind go to your Amazon wishlist and think that you would be more content if you had the things on that list? Do you want a bit more in the emergency fund or the retirement fund? Maybe a little extra money to help relieve the squeeze on your wallet at the gas pump? Do you wish that you were just a bit healthier, a bit more fit, a bit more free time to enjoy life, enjoy family?

It doesn’t take much for our contentment to sour as we think of all the things we could have or want to have. We think that contentment will come with just the little gains here and there - the things from the wishlist, the spice in food, flavor in drink, variety in clothes, a little extra cash. And how do you get these things? More money. A raise here, a little extra work there, maybe some resumes for a second job or a better job. New contentment is achieved but then fades. We go for more money and our life begins to form and conform around the love of money: gaining more would seem to get us more happiness, a new level of contentment. Our love of money starts to become our self-appointed master, the one whose call we don’t ignore but slavishly follow.

This is what Paul warns against: “Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.” (verses 9-10)

How can we wander from the faith and pierce ourselves with many griefs because we love money? Judas Iscariot is the poster child of the real-life effects of the love of money. Judas loved money, often helping himself to it. So when the opportunity was presented to gain 30 silver coins to betray Jesus, his life conformed to his love of money. He betrayed the Son of Man which led to Jesus’ crucifixion. When Judas realized that he had betrayed innocent blood for some extra cash, he was seized with remorse. He threw the money back at the Pharisees who had given it to him, but no one offered him forgiveness. Not believing that he could be forgiven, he hung himself, committed suicide. For money that he didn’t keep nor could keep, he pierced himself with many griefs and wandered from the faith, losing everything - a sad truth we’ll hear again next week when Jesus tells us about the rich man and Lazarus.

Paul tells us that money is so uncertain and that we can’t keep it. Money is fleeting. Fortunes get lost. Stock markets crash. Businesses fold. Jobs go away. Your ability to work doesn’t last forever. You can scrimp and save and plan and bargain hunt, and yet it can still be stolen from your home, taken through identity theft. “We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.” (verse 7) On top of that, a love for money tempts you to live a selfish lifestyle to keep it all to yourself and use it only for yourself. It tempts you to hoard it, be stingy with it, reluctant to share it, to help others. With money, your contentment doesn’t last;

you always find yourself wanting, needing, a little more. Money can't save you. And if you serve it, you will separate yourself from God like Judah. This is how the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.

Although money doesn't save us or bring us lasting contentment, it's not inherently evil. It's a tool to be used for blessings. Money buys us the necessities like clothing, shoes, food, drink, house, and home. Many of us are blessed to not live solely a subsistence lifestyle – a hand to mouth living, having absolutely nothing extra to spend on anything that isn't strictly a necessity. We get to spend money on coffee and gum and flavored drinks and tasty treats and cars and rvs. We have extra income to give to a charity or to church. We build up money and time off to go on a vacation or go for a drive or a bike ride, to go see a movie, buy a tv or a new video game. We are blessed to have money that we can spend on things for both necessities and enjoyment.

Where did the money come from? We're tempted to point to the use of our time and our talents in a job for the source of all our money. If that's true, then the money belongs to us, and we rightfully own it. But who gave you that time and those talents, the strength and ability to work? All of these came from the Creator, God Almighty. He is the source of all the money, all the wealth we have. In a way, I guess we could say that all our money is on loan from God. It really belongs to him. He gave it to us to be good stewards of it – to use it for the necessities as well as for enjoyment. God "richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment." (verse 17b)

If we find ourselves discontent with what we have, this is where our attitude toward money needs adjusting. Money is not our life. It's not our master. It's not what makes life enjoyable. Instead, we recognize all our money is not really ours, but God is loaning it to me. God has the right to my money, and I actually don't. On top of that, it's temporary. It's a tool to be used to serve us and others.

When we realize all our money is God's gift to us, this changes our attitude away from loving money and away from discontentment. If we understand that we brought nothing into this world and that we can take nothing out of it, then I can be content that I have what I need – food and clothing, just like Paul said. And when I have even more than that, then I'll be thrilled that God has so generously poured wealth into my life for both necessities and enjoyment.

When we look beyond what money can buy, we start to see just how rich God has made us. He didn't just give us all our wealth for necessities and enjoyment. He also bought righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness for us. It's all these things that Jesus lived out for us in perfection. It was Jesus who bought us from all our sins, from death, and from the power of the devil. He did this not with gold or silver, not with earthly wealth. No, he used his holy, precious blood and his innocent suffering and death. He paid the price for our life with his life, a price none of us could pay or match. By the one-of-a-kind price he paid, he gave us godliness, perfection, as well as eternal life with him. He paid for and gave us the complete package, a gift that will is not temporary or fleeting, a gift that cannot be lost through catastrophe or natural disaster or break-ins because the one who bought it and gave it to us is rock-solid, dependable, unshakable, and incorruptible - unlike wealth.

Since God gave us what money can't buy – the complete package of salvation - how much more we can be content and thank God for all the things we have when it comes to money and what it can buy. So, thank God for all the gifts that he gives us through the gift of money. Thank God when you can wake up and put on your clothes and shoes in the morning, that you have hot water to bathe, a razor and shaving cream to shave, food to eat for breakfast, coffee and OJ to drink. Thank God when you get in the car, turn the key, it starts, and you have gas in the tank. Thank God for the mechanic and the tow truck and the money to pay them when the car doesn't start. Thank God for the pillow you get to lay your head on, the sheets that cover you and warm you or the fan or ac that cool you. Thank God for the Netflix or the Disney+ subscription, the NFL game that you watch today. Thank God for the next candy bar and soda. Thank God for the next paycheck, the next grocery shop, the next vacation. All of these gifts come through God's gift of money to us – no matter if our wealth is big or small. Thank God that he gives us not just necessities, not just godliness that no one could ever buy, but also everything for our enjoyment.

In the coming weeks, we'll talk more about how we, being rich from God, can use his gift of money. Paul sets that tone for us today by writing: "Command [those who are rich] to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share." (verse 18) You are rich. You are rich in godliness, as Christ lived perfectly for you and sacrificed himself to take away your sins. Thank God that he provides money to us both for necessities and for our enjoyment. Help us, Lord, to always be content with what you've given us because it really belongs to you, and you give us way more than just enough. Amen.