

## 1 TIMOTHY 6:6-10

### GODLINESS WITH CONTENTMENT IS GREAT GAIN

“But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.”<sup>1</sup>

**I** concluded a previous message by citing the fifth verse of this chapter, but without commenting on what the Apostle meant in the final phrase.<sup>2</sup> Paul had just exposed those individuals who were creating such grief in the congregation in Ephesus; he stated that these individuals (likely false teachers) were “depraved in mind and deprived of truth.” The evidence offered for this view was that these individuals were especially denoted as warped because they were “imagining that godliness is a means of gain.”

The first verse of today’s text is a conjunction that should be considered adversative; the verse should not be separated from what has preceded. This means that the verb is emphatic. Thus, Paul’s intent was that readers would read, “But godliness with contentment *is* great gain.” Some translations have sought to demonstrate this emphasis by adding words to indicate emphasis. One translation reads, “Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment.”<sup>3</sup> Another translation treats the verse, “But godliness *actually* is a means of great gain when accompanied with contentment.”<sup>4</sup>

Paul is contrasting the attitude of the false teachers with true godliness. He is urging Timothy to embrace true godliness while rejecting succumbing to the allure of immediate gratification. In doing this, he has performed a great service for contemporary Christians. However, if we are not confronted with the Apostle’s teaching, we will find ourselves drawn toward self-destruction; and in the process, we will congratulate ourselves that we are godly. Paul has anticipated Peter’s censure of false teachers.

Remember what Peter said about such individuals. “In their greed [false teachers] will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep” [2 PETER 2:3]. Just as Paul has condemned the false teachers as “depraved in mind and deprived of truth” and motivated by a love of money, so Peter exposes the primary motivation of false teachers as an unbridled love of money. In fact, Peter says these individuals “have hearts trained in greed” [2 PETER 2:14]. Eugene Peterson has captured the scathing power with which Peter condemns these men in that second letter to the Diaspora, “Their specialty is greed, and they’re experts at it.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible, English Standard Version**, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Stark, “A Fighting Fundamentalist,” Sermon preached 10 July 2014, <http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/clientimages/42652/sermonarchive/1%20timothy%206.02b-5%20conflict%20from%20the%20pulpit.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> **The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version** (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN 1989)

<sup>4</sup> **New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update** (The Lockman Foundation, LaHabra, CA 1995)

<sup>5</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, **The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language** (NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO 2005)

As a significant aside, the word translated “false” in Peter’s Letter is the Greek word *plastós*. The word sounds much like our English word “plastic.” Like plastic, false teachers can make their words appear to be anything they want. They can accommodate any expectation because; they can twist and distort their teaching such that it sounds plausible and even true. Thus, the unwary are easily deceived.

The false teachers “traffic in” separating Christians from their money. The practise of enriching oneself off the goods of the believers evidently became a problem among the early churches. In an ancient work known as *The Didache* we are given these instructions, “Concerning the Apostles and Prophets, act thus according to the ordinance of the Gospel. Let every Apostle who comes to you be received as the Lord, but let him not stay more than one day, or if need be a second as well; but if he stay three days, he is a false prophet. And when an Apostle goes forth let him accept nothing but bread till he reach his night’s lodging; but if he ask for money, he is a false prophet.”<sup>6</sup>

Compare what is written and the tenor of the Apostles’ stern words with the emphasis in some religious circles today. From earliest days in my service before the Lord I have heard people equate acquisition of wealth with righteousness. Wealth is presented as evidence of God’s favour—and it is. However, the absence of wealth is not indicative of God’s disfavour! Wealth is not the sole evidence of God’s blessing. In fact, accumulating wealth often blinds the eye to what is truly valuable. No better evidence of the veracity of that statement can be given than to recall a story Jesus told.

“Someone in the crowd said to him, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.’ But he said to him, ‘Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?’ And he said to them, ‘Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.’ And he told them a parable, saying, ‘The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, “What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?” And he said, “I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’” But God said to him, “Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God”’” [LUKE 12:13-21].

Focus on the cautionary statement the Master delivered to those listening to His words: “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” We tend to focus on what a person has rather than who a person is. We are more aware of an individual’s possessions than we are aware of an individual’s spiritual condition. In too many instances, we promote people within the assembly based on their material wealth rather than their spiritual wealth. What is worse, we are prone to sacrifice our spiritual position to pursue the acquisition of goods. We do this to our own detriment.

Let me emphasise the parable we just read with an account related by the Master. What is related here is more than a parable—it is a factual account of a man who actually lived in ancient Israel. This does not appear to be a hypothetical situation; Jesus was familiar with the individuals in the account and with their final condition. He names names, which would not be the case in a parable. He indicates that the individual continues to exist in a state of torment, which would be known only to the One who judges. Therefore, this account must be taken quite seriously by each of us.

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<sup>6</sup> **The Didache, or Teaching of the Twelve Apostles**, XI, in Pope Clement I et. al., *The Apostolic Fathers*, vol. 1, The Loeb Classical Library (Macmillan, London, New York, Heinemann 1912-1913) 327

“There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, “Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.” But Abraham said, “Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.” And he said, “Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house—for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.” But Abraham said, “They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.” And he said, “No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.” He said to him, “If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead”” [LUKE 16:19-31].

I read the full pericope, but I want us to focus on a generalised concept—this rich man was condemned because his wealth had caused him to shut his heart to the needs of others. Clearly, an absence of repentance figures in his dark destiny. He is quite eager that his brothers repent and avoid the torments of Hades. Again, wealth blinded the rich man to the needs of others; he was so focused on acquiring wealth and using that acquired wealth for his own comfort that he failed to see that he was accountable to God who gives wealth. If I live as though the accumulation of wealth is the summum bonum of life, then I must be prepared to accept that I am not rich toward God. Thus, I must accept the consequences of my own actions when I pursue wealth to the exclusion of God’s will in my life.

I have taken care to emphasise this at the outset precisely because it is distressingly easy to become enamoured of money. Jesus warned, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” [MATTHEW 6:21]. Before going any further in our study this day, I encourage you to take a brief test. Do you wonder what your treasure may be? You may quickly determine what your treasure is by a simple four-part test. Write down the test and apply it to your own life.

Your treasure is that which you would most hate to lose should it be taken from you. Your treasure is that to which your mind turns automatically when you are free to think of anything you wish. Your treasure is that which engages your sincerest attention and occupies the majority of your free time. Your treasure is that which you most love. The great tragedy surrounding our treasures is that we are oftentimes ensnared by our treasures, and we soon become slaves to the very things we treasure most.<sup>7</sup>

With this admittedly extended introduction, let’s explore together the instruction provided to Timothy concerning godliness. Let’s caution ourselves from the outset not to focus on the things which are destined for dust as though they can make us happy. Happiness is not joy, and joy comes from a living relationship with the True and Living God—not from things.

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<sup>7</sup> Cited from Michael Stark, “Worshipping the Snake,” (Sermon), <http://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/worshipping-the-snake-michael-stark-sermon-on-faith-98547.asp>; see also, Michael Stark, “The Danger Lurking in Knowledge of the Truth,” (Sermon), <https://sermons.logos.com/#q=danger%20lurking%20in%20knowledge/&content=/submissions/33583&tab=paneTabHome&pane=homePane>

**GREAT GAIN IN A WORLD OF DISCONTENT** — “But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.”

As I already noted, the conjunction is adversative. Paul is expanding on what he has said concerning the false teachers. He has exposed them by pointing out their motives and moral/ethical character. Because they are “depraved in mind and deprived of the truth” they imagine that “godliness is a means of gain.” In short, their primary concern is enriching themselves. However, Paul wants it understood that godliness with contentment actually is great gain! It all depends upon our perspective and whether we are able to take in the scope of our existence. If we are focused only on this present moment, then we will never appreciate true godliness. If we can see the whole of our continued existence, then godliness is great gain, provided it is coupled with contentment.

Godliness is a major concern in the estimate of the Apostle. Paul wants Christians to “lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way” [1 TIMOTHY 2:2]. He urges believers to “train [themselves] for godliness” [1 TIMOTHY 4:7, 8]. He exposes the false teachers because they fail to teach that which “accords with godliness” [1 TIMOTHY 6:3]. In a short while he will counsel Timothy to “Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness” [1 TIMOTHY 6:11]. Throughout the entire letter, Paul holds forth Christ Jesus Himself as “the mystery of godliness” [1 TIMOTHY 3:16].

In a later letter, he will warn Timothy of conditions during “the last days.” “Understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power” [2 TIMOTHY 3:1-5].

Godliness is obviously important to Paul, and it should be important to us. When Paul uses this word, he has in view behaviour that is informed by belief. This is important. Faith alone saves; but the faith that saves is never alone. In other words, those who are born from above are transformed by God’s grace. They do not remain as they were. The word conveys the idea of living as God would have us live or of living as God has told us we should live.<sup>8</sup> This is likely what Paul has in mind when he writes, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” [ROMANS 12:1, 2].

We invite people to Christ, saying, “Come as you are”: however, when Christ receives an individual, He will never leave that individual as he was! Christ will change that individual as the process of transformation begins. The individual will begin a transformation as she is changed into the image of Christ.

I must take a moment to point out a heresy that is proclaimed from many evangelical churches. People are invited to make a decision for Christ. So long as they pray the right prayer or say the right words, they are assured they are saved. However, the same preachers plead with people to “rededicate” their lives because they are living as they always lived. Hear the Word!

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<sup>8</sup> See Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, **Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains** (United Bible Societies, New York, NY 1996) 531

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“By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” [EPHESIANS 2:8-10].

Listen carefully to Paul’s words penned to the saints in Colossae. “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

“Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator” [COLOSSIANS 3:1-10].

We do not become religious in order to be godly, but if we are godly we will express the new creation. We will love the people of God. We will seek Christ’s glory. We will endeavour to honour the Father. We will want to know the will of God. We will delight to be with the people of God. If these marks are absent from our lives, we must know that we have deceived ourselves. The preacher that permits you to be content with saying a prayer, or with performing a rite, or with saying that you know the date and the hour you believed is not your friend. If you are born from above you will reflect the divine parentage.

Paul didn’t merely say that we are to be religious, but his statement was that “godliness with contentment is great gain.” So, it is not only that we are godly, but that we are content in our situation. The idea conveyed by the Apostle’s choice of word in this instance is that one is satisfied and sufficient. The word is rather rare in the New Testament, but that doesn’t mean that we don’t know what the Apostle intended us to understand.

In 2 CORINTHIANS 9:8 Paul has written, “God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.” Undoubtedly, those of you who are regular in attendance will remember this statement. The word translated “sufficiency” is the same word translated “contentment” in our text. Thus, it is apparent that Paul intends for us to understand that God makes His grace to abound to His child; and the child of God will then be content because he is sufficient in Christ for every situation. The Christian is content with her circumstances—she is self-content with her situation and with what she has.

A great illustration of this self-sufficiency is provided by the Apostle himself. Writing the Philippian Christians, Paul urges them to rejoice [see PHILIPPIANS 4:4-7]. He follows up by speaking of his own situation. “I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me” [PHILIPPIANS 4:10-13].

Where was Paul when he wrote these words? He was incarcerated in the Tullianum, the Mamertine Prison. Chained at all times to a Roman soldier, he was restricted in his movements. Yet, he could state, “I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.”

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Let me speak quite pointedly to you who listen today. If you are always restless, searching for something to soothe your soul, you cannot say that you are fulfilling the apostolic ideal given in our text. The church butterfly that flits from one church to another, always seeking something she cannot define, gives strong evidence that she knows little either of godliness or of contentment. The individual who is always endeavouring to strike some big deal that will put him on easy street gives rather convincing proof that he is neither godly nor content. Thus, a great verse to memorise is this sixth verse: “Godliness with contentment is great gain.” Memorise it; and when you are discontent with your lot in life, dissatisfied with your church experience, disillusioned with what you have, recite this verse and meditate on what it means until God’s peace again floods your soul.

**THE DELUSION OF MATERIALISM** — “We brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils.”

Life is defined by a hyphen. One day, each of us shall leave this life. Family and friends will likely erect a tombstone over our grave. It will perhaps have some epitaph engraved on it, reflecting the sentiments our memory evokes for those who knew us. Then, our name will be written on the stone and two dates—when we were born and when we died. Separating those dates will be a hyphen; and all of life is defined by that hyphen.

In his grief, Job testified, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” [JOB 1:21]. His testimony anticipates Solomon’s sombre words. “As he came from his mother’s womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand” [ECCLESIASTES 5:15].

How sobering are the words of the Psalmist:

“Be not afraid when a man becomes rich,  
when the glory of his house increases.  
For when he dies he will carry nothing away;  
his glory will not go down after him.  
For though, while he lives, he counts himself blessed  
—and though you get praise when you do well for yourself—  
his soul will go to the generation of his fathers,  
who will never again see light.  
Man in his pomp yet without understanding is like the beasts that perish.”  
[PSALM 49:16-20]

So far as this life is concerned, we enter with nothing, and we must leave with nothing. An old saying informs us that there are no pockets in a death shroud.

The Apostle is correct when he writes, “We brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.” When we leave this life, we shall leave behind all that we once possessed. We shall stand as open books before the Judge of all mankind. Paul cautions believers, “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” [2 CORINTHIANS 5:10]. We will have nothing with which to influence Him in the pronouncements He shall make.

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I am intrigued that those coming out of the Great Tribulation are said to be clothed in white robes. The Word of God informs us, “They were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been” [REVELATION 6:11]. These saints will suffer and die because of their faith. After their death, they are seen under the altar where they plead with the Lord God to avenge their deaths. However, what should be of interest is the fact that they bring nothing to Heaven; what they have is given them.

Those whom God rewards will be clothed in white garments [see REVELATION 3:4; 4:4]. They do not bring the robes with them; the robes are given. The saints receive crowns from the hand of the Righteous Judge [see REVELATION 4:4]. The crowns are given by Him who judges righteously. We bring nothing into Heaven. We are there by grace; and we shall be clothed by grace. By grace, we shall be adorned. With harps supplied by Him who gives us a song we shall sing sweet songs of victory and praise before the eternal throne. We brought nothing into the world, and it is certain that we can take nothing out. Just as our presence in Heaven itself is by grace, so it is that with which we shall be clothed and adorned will be a matter of grace.

Paul continues by stating, “If we have food and clothing, with these we will be content” [1 TIMOTHY 6:8]. Again, his words anticipate what will be written in the Letter to Hebrew Christians. “Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’” [HEBREWS 13:5].

The false teachers—both those whom Paul was then confronting and those who plague the churches in this day—are motivated by insatiable greed; they crave money—as much money as possible. They are experts at bilking people in the church out of their wealth. This is a common biblical indictment and characterisation of religious charlatans. Consider a catalogue of pronouncements of condemnation against such charlatans.

“From the least to the greatest of them,  
everyone is greedy for unjust gain;  
and from prophet to priest,  
everyone deals falsely.”

[JEREMIAH 6:13]

“I will give their wives to others  
and their fields to conquerors,  
because from the least to the greatest  
everyone is greedy for unjust gain;  
from prophet to priest,  
everyone deals falsely.”

[JEREMIAH 8:10]

Writing Titus, Paul lists the standards for those who are to be appointed to eldership. Among the qualifications are these found in his letter to Titus. “An overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain” [TITUS 1:7].

Contrast the fact that an elder must not be “greedy for gain” with Paul’s censure of false teachers. “[The false teachers] must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach” [TITUS 1:11].

Nor should anyone think that Paul is alone in warning about those who provide oversight for the flock of God to avoid greed. Peter writes, “I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock” [1 PETER 5:1-3].

Elders are to do their work because they have been divinely appointed; they are not to labour in the Lord’s Vineyard in order to make a lot of money. If an elder appears to be working solely for money, the congregation should be wary of that individual’s spiritual condition, questioning the teaching he delivers.

I need to speak pointedly to this matter. The televangelists have done a grave disservice to the people of God with their emphasis on money. I have been personally acquainted with some well-known preachers of the Word. I have never known one who laboured for financial reward. Dr. Criswell had to be begged to take a raise because it was unseemly that the Senior Pastor would receive a lower salary than his associates. I was present when he presented a gift to the church representing every penny he had ever received in salary. God had blessed him and he wanted to return to the church all that God’s people had ever given him.

From earliest days, Billy Graham took a modest salary from the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. It was evidence that money did not motivate his work. Jerry Falwell didn’t take a big salary. God provides richly for those willing to trust Him and His provision. Such accounts are in contrast to lavish dog houses, massive rings, Rolex watches, expensive tailored suits and luxury cars with which many of the televangelists have become notorious. Let the elder hear the voice of the Master, “Be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” [LUKE 12:15].

The teaching of godly elders should be contrasted to the false teachers that were even then infiltrating the churches. Jude wrote of such individuals. “Woe to [false teachers]! For they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam’s error and perished in Korah’s rebellion” [JUDE 11]. He continued by stating of these deceitful workers, “These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires; they are loud-mouthed boasters, showing favoritism to gain advantage” [JUDE 16].

Paul contrasts those who are contented [VERSE 8] with those who are focused on obtaining wealth [VERSE 9]. His language makes it clear that he is speaking of people with a deep, settled drive to gain wealth. Those in view are determined to get rich; they have set their will to achieve that goal. Tragically, focused as they are on obtaining what they desire, they are insensible of the danger to which they are exposing themselves. When Paul says these individuals “fall into temptation, into a snare,” he uses a verb that is used only two other times in these Pastoral Letters. He cautions that immature individuals who are prematurely elevated to eldership are susceptible to falling “into the condemnation of the devil” [1 TIMOTHY 3:6]. He expands on this by cautioning that such immature people who have no consideration for how they are seen by outsiders as liable to falling “into disgrace, [even] into a snare of the devil” [1 TIMOTHY 3:7].

False teachers and immature individuals are susceptible to grave pitfalls. They are liable to fall into temptation—they set their heart on acquiring riches, exposing themselves to a test they are sure to fail. The Psalmist warned, “If riches increase, set not your heart on them” [PSALM 62:10]. However, those who trust in riches will fall [see PROVERBS 11:28; PSALM 49:6; 52:7]. Falling into temptation is a grave danger, against which the Apostle warns. What is worse, the fall into this particular temptation is so terribly subtle.



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Scripture also warns that false teachers and immature individuals are susceptible to falling into a snare. Elsewhere in his Letters to Timothy, Paul warns against falling into the “snare of the devil” [1 TIMOTHY 3:7; 2 TIMOTHY 2:26]. This leads me to conclude that Satan himself is behind the temptation to wealth. Perhaps this accounts for why the temptation is so subtle.

The third pitfall Paul notes is that false teachers and immature elders are susceptible to yielding to desires. At first glance, this may be somewhat surprising, but those who pursue wealth open themselves to a virtual Pandora’s Box from which multiple desires rush to overwhelm the unwary. False teachers thrive on those who are in bondage to their own desires. “Among [the false teachers] are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions” [2 TIMOTHY 3:6].

This accounts for the virtual certainty of moral lapse of those who are false teachers. The televangelists were almost certain to fall, because they were overwhelmed by their own desires. They not only opened the door to their desires, they embraced them! These desires were once part of our lives. To Titus, Paul writes, “We ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures” [TITUS 3:3].

The desires in view may include illicit sexual desires, but it goes far beyond to include greed and twisted religious desires. Let me leave you with these two passages to substantiate that danger. Listen again to Paul’s words in our text as he warns against greed. “Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction” [1 TIMOTHY 6:9]. As for twisted religious impulses, listen to his words written in his second Letter to Timothy. “The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions” [2 TIMOTHY 4:3].

**THE CONFLICT BETWEEN OUR VALUES AND GOD’S VALUES** — “The love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.”

As she prayed in gratitude to God, Hannah uttered a significant truth that is easily forgotten: “The LORD makes poor and makes rich” [1 SAMUEL 2:7]. Her prayer anticipated David’s confession concerning this same truth. As David prayed before the assembly when Solomon assumed the throne, he confessed, “Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all” [1 CHRONICLES 29:12].

Moses, as he presented the Law for the second time, warned Israel (and consequently, us), “Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock, who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end. Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’ You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day” [DEUTERONOMY 8:11-18].

**1 TIMOTHY 6:6-10**  
**GODLINESS WITH CONTENTMENT IS GREAT GAIN**

We face a struggle each day. We are bombarded with the message that wealth will make us content. Tragically, we buy into this lie far more often than we care to admit. “If only I had a little more,” we imagine, “I could be happy.” Perhaps we should hear the cautionary words Solomon wrote so many millennia past.

“The righteous has enough to satisfy his appetite,  
but the belly of the wicked suffers want.”

**[PROVERBS 13:25]**

Let me contrast what is written in this verse to another verse from the pen of the Wise Man.

“The LORD does not let the righteous go hungry,  
but he thwarts the craving of the wicked.”

**[PROVERBS 10:3]**

I admit that I can’t give a full explanation of what Paul has in mind when he writes that, “It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.” Paul does not name names, but he clearly has some in mind. I don’t have to think too long to recall some who in their mad pursuit of money skewered their soul and wandered away from the faith. I don’t say they are lost, for if they were saved, they are miserable as God Himself deals with them. I do say that they have become almost worthless to the cause of Christ.

I recall a young man who hit the ground running. He confessed Christ; salvation broke out on him like the measles. He was an eager witness of his new found faith, eagerly preaching the Good News of life in Christ, doing so on street corners. He was powerfully used to encourage fellow believers in a young church. He chose to continue his education in order to seek a position in the business world. After school, he was rising quickly in the world of import and export. He was wildly successful at his job, beginning to amass a veritable fortune. He married a beautiful Christian woman; and all seemed set for a joyous, powerful life.

The first cracks appeared when he said he didn’t want a child. Though his adamant refusal broke the heart of his wife, he insisted that a little one would demand too much of his time. He was making money, and he didn’t want to lose any opportunity to acquire more. He justified his effort by saying that he could give more to the cause of Christ—but he didn’t. His time became precious—he was too busy for prayer meetings, too busy to fulfil the duties the congregation had entrusted to him, too busy to participate in the life of the assembly. Eventually, he simply dropped out of church because he was making too much money.

I lost track of him, but I grieved as he deliberately turned to pursue money. Word came that his was a joyless existence; but the grip money had on him would not permit him to return to his first love. It was reported that he and his wife continued to live in the same house, but the spark was missing from their union. They no longer prayed or shared in the things of God. Don’t let this be you.

Determine that you will guard your heart. Determine that you will hold God’s values prominently in your life. If you have slipped in this delusive area of life, confess your sin to Him who forgives. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” **[1 JOHN 1:9]**. Let this be the day you begin anew a humble walk in the presence of the True and Living God. Amen.