

Go for Great Gain!

1 Timothy 6:6–10, 17-19 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.

In Christ Jesus who gave his very life to save ours, dear fellow redeemed,

Have you seen the Turbo Tax commercial featuring the young fellow who's invested in cryptocurrency? He gets a notification from his broker. The gain in his investment makes him rich. In disbelief he proclaims: "I'm a millionaire!" The news is life changing. He begins to celebrate and pack up his desk. He can quit his job! But seconds later he's notified that all the gains have evaporated, and his must come to grips with the realization: "I'm not a millionaire."

Can you relate? Maybe you're not ready to shout, "I'm a millionaire!", but perhaps you've experienced some kind of reversal of fortune. Maybe you've gotten a long-awaited raise, only to see it eaten up by rising inflation. Maybe you're headed into retirement or already there. Have you checked your 401K recently? How do feel when the gains you've made evaporate? Do you feel a sense of despair? Are you fretting about your financial security?

Today we'll receive some much-needed financial advice from an unlikely source – the Apostle Paul. That's right, St. Paul steps in to serve as our financial consultant and what he has to say will serve us well no matter our age or circumstance. To rich and not so rich alike, Paul urges all of us to "Go for Great Gain!" He advises us that we find this gain through contentment; and we find it in godliness.

To help us be content, Paul briefly reviews our life story. **For we brought nothing into the world... (1 Timothy 6:7).** Each of us started with nothing. More to the point, we came into this world quite helpless. We couldn't provide for ourselves, couldn't feed or clothe ourselves. And yet, here we are. How did we survive? Someone cared for us and met our every need. Do you remember how content you were as a child? We trusted our parents, imperfect though they were, to take care of us and for the most part, they did. How much more we can trust our perfect **God who**, as Paul points out, **richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. (1 Timothy 6:17).** Contentment comes from trusting that God knows our all our needs great and small and, better yet, knows exactly how and when to supply them. When we believe that God will not fail to care for us, then we will be content not only with the food, clothing, and shelter that he provides, but we'll also be content with the means by which he provides these things. When God and his promises are the focus of our worship, we will find satisfaction in our work and our paycheck. And as an added bonus, our sleep, as King Solomon says, will prove "sweet." (Ecclesiastes 5:12).

So, what's wrong with me? Why do I have sleepless nights? Why are there days when I dread my work? Why do I worry about so many things? What's wrong? I'm wrong – because I've bought

into the biggest lie of them all. I've fooled myself into thinking that I am the master of my own fate. I tell myself that if I manage to accumulate enough money, my life will be happier and my future more secure. Have you fallen for the same lie?

When we think this way, we begin to love and trust what money can do for us more than we love and trust God. That's messed up, my friends. Don't take it from me; listen to the richest man who has ever lived: **Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. This too is meaningless. (Ecclesiastes 5:10).** What Solomon says goes for all of us whether we have a little or a lot. If our trust is in money, we will never have enough of it. We'll never be content.

Now understand, money itself is not the problem. In fact, it's a fantastic gift from God which he gives for our enjoyment. Money's not the culprit. "...the love of money..." is the problem. Paul says this greed-born love is at the ...**root of all kinds of evil. (1 Timothy 6:10).** **People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. (1 Timothy 6:9).** You've heard stories of people who've embezzled funds or who cheat on their taxes so that they can have and keep more money. We all know people who've become workaholics, neglecting their spouse and kids, convincing themselves that those same neglected family members will thank them one day when they're living in a nicer home or riding in a newer car or going on that expensive vacation. Then they'll be content! Will they? How many homes have been ruined by the love of money? How many children have been taught by such a poor example, that if they want to be happy, they too must pursue wealth at all costs?

The love of money is a clear and present danger. So much so, that it threatens to destroy the most important relationship of them all – our relationship with God. Paul says: **Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. (1 Timothy 6:10).** Paul's not saying that we will suddenly wake up one morning and no longer know who Jesus is. It's much more subtle than that. As money and wealth gain a more prominent place in our lives, we can become arrogant and self-reliant. We don't think to turn to God because we imagine that we don't need to. On the other hand, if we devote all our energy to becoming rich and it doesn't happen, we can become bitter toward God and envious of the gifts he gives to others. We might question his love, imagining that he's holding out on us. In this bitterness we stop seeking his help. We stop listening to his Word. The result of either scenario is the same – we cause ourselves tremendous grief. When troubles come, and they always do, we don't know where to turn because we've spiritually bankrupted ourselves. We've run out of faith, having long neglected God Word and long forgotten his love and forgiveness. Without these, we'd be forever lost in hell.

Paul wants to make sure this doesn't happen to any of us. So, he not only reminds us how we came into the world but also how we will leave it – namely, penniless. **For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. (1 Timothy 6:7).** There's a reality check! When all is said and done, when my life here is over, when I've been dead for five minutes, what is it about the life I lived here that will have mattered the most? Will it matter that I died with a tidy sum in my bank account? Will any of my titles or achievements mean anything? Not a thing, because there are no banks and no trophy cases on the other side of the grave. To Paul's point, if we can't take these things with us when we die, then they cannot bring us great and lasting gain. Should we despise them? Of course not. Neither should we make them our lord and master? Wealth, great or small is a blessing from God. Each one of us can be content, trusting that we received from God exactly what was best for us and our relationship with him. He never gives too much or too little. It's always just right. Believing this is great gain! Do you know what else is most satisfying? Using these blessings from God to honor him. To this end, Paul urges us to Go for Great Gain, gain that is found in godliness.

Paul writes to young Pastor Timothy, **Command [your congregation] 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. (1 Timothy 6:18-19).** When Paul says, “command,” he doesn’t mean that Timothy or any of us pastors are to shout orders like an army general. The word that Paul uses has as its root meaning the idea of instructing. In basic training, new recruits are given commands which are intended to instruct them as to how to serve and survive as soldiers. So it is in the service of God. God wants his followers to be “godly.” In other words, God wants us, who have been recreated in his image at our baptism, to be like him and to do what he does.

God always does good things. We are to do good things with the wealth and possessions he gives us. We do good when we use what he has given us to provide for the physical and spiritual needs of those who depend on us. It is a godly thing to pay our bills and meet all our financial obligations. This pleases our God. It also pleases him when we are generous and willing to share what we have with others.

I suspect that this part of the instruction may be a bit more difficult for us, who by nature are sinful and selfish. From little on we struggle to let others use our stuff, to say nothing of giving it to them for keeps. Perhaps here we find ourselves in the same situation as the rich young man who let Jesus know how proud he was of himself for keep all the commandments and so, by his way of thinking, earn for himself a place in God’s heaven. Checking in with Jesus, he wanted to make sure there wasn’t anything he was missing. In love, Jesus told him, **One thing you lack. Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come follow me. At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. (Mark 10:21-22).**

I share these words of Jesus with you because they speak to the nature and purpose of our godliness. If, like that young man, we’re thinking that our godliness will somehow help secure for us a place in heaven. We’ve got it all wrong. Jesus says that to accomplish such a thing, we would have to have a perfect spirit of self-sacrifice every moment of every day. None of us does because we came into this world with a sinful nature. We can never be saved by our godliness. But we are saved – by Christ’s godliness. In his godly generosity, he lived a rich life of perfection as our Substitute and pledges all the benefits of this life to each of us in full. What does that mean? It means that in God’s gradebook, Jesus gives us all the credit for his love, his contentment, and his generosity – generosity that did not end with the gift of his perfection. Oh no. We needed more from him than that and he gave it. We needed his sacrifice for our sin. And so, he gave himself up on the altar of the cross. There he paid the cost of our greed and arrogance, our worry and discontent, our stinginess and selfishness. He suffered until all our sin, all the world’s was paid one and for all. And then to prove that our great debt is canceled, Jesus rose from the grave!

Jesus did all of this for our greatest gain. Through faith, we have as his gift, all the godliness we need to lay hold of the life that is truly life. Here and now that life is lived in gratitude to God, gratitude that expresses itself so wonderfully when we are sharing Christ with fellow sinners, people who will hear the good news, and by its power become our eternal friends in heaven. This is the treasure that awaits us! This is all that will matter five minutes after we are dead. Because that’s when we will be meeting and greeting all those precious souls: family members, neighbors and so many others who have been blessed, in part, by the investments we are making in the gospel ministry of Jesus and his church. This is what it means to Go for Great Gain, to live content and godly lives, counting always on the holiness and forgiveness of Christ to supply us with all that we need to reflect his love and so honor his saving name, now and forever. Amen.