

GREED OR GODLINESS: WHERE IS GREAT GAIN?

1 Timothy 6.1-10, 17-19

Greed is a mentality of always wanting more. Contentment is a mentality of resting in God's provision. How we view money and material possessions reflects the condition of our heart.

Scripture talks about money because it plays a role in everyday life

We will notice how the household rules commending "honor" and "good service" involves financial considerations. Honoring widows, elders, and masters requires a generous disposition.

While the slave-master relationship of the 1st century was different from American slavery of the 18th & 19th centuries, this passage (along with Ephesians 6.5-9) was misappropriated to justify a sinful and unbiblical institution.

Present day Christians wish Paul strictly forbade slavery of all kinds. This would have led to the collapse of society since there were an estimated 50 million slaves in the empire. Or worse, this would have led to a great loss of life because Rome violently oppressed slave revolts. Instead, Paul laid down the principles that Christians later employed to end the slave trade (Galatians 3.28; Philemon).

Some in the Ephesian church were wondering why they should work hard for a master who was not a Christian. Paul says that hard work will serve as a testimony and is faithful to the true doctrine (1 Timothy 6.1). Others reasoned that they could cut corners when working for a Christian master. This, too, was a poor reflection of following Christ (1 Timothy 6.2). Contentment, then, is not at odds with hard work.

A principle for today: How we act in the workplace matters to God.

Greed grips the heart and makes us miserable

1 Timothy 6.10 is among the most misquoted verses in the Bible. The problem is not money but an inordinate love of money (Cf. 1 Timothy 1.5). It is the "craving" of money that entangles. We can compare this mentality against the qualifications for leadership in the church (1 Timothy 3.3, 8).

We should pay careful attention to the words Paul uses regarding greed. We become "ensnared" by false desires and we "plunge...into ruin and destruction" (1 Timothy 6.9, Ecclesiastes 5.10).

The love of money shows that it has become an idol, giving us a false sense of security. What we think gives us great gain actually gives us "great loss" (1 Timothy 6.9-10; Proverbs 28.20).

Godly contentment is great gain

As has been the case throughout the letter, Paul has linked sound doctrine with right living. We gain the right perspective by thinking of eternity (1 Timothy 6.7). Those who are rich in this age ought to be generous, motivated by laying up treasures in heaven (1 Timothy 6.17-19; Cf. Mark 10.21-23).

We learn that godliness is the source of true contentment (Cf. Philippians 4.10-13).

In his book *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*, the Puritan Jeremiah Burroughs defined his terms: "Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition".

Does my attitude towards money reflect my belief in the sufficiency of Christ?

How we view money will contribute to Gospel advance.

Key Ideas: Let's have a Christ-centered view of money and material.

Application Questions:

What principles from the slave-master relationship are applicable to present day employee-employer relationships?

What connection is Paul making between work ethic and Gospel advance?

What does it mean to be rich in the world's eyes? What does it mean to be rich in God's eyes?

What is the key to true Christian contentment (1 Timothy 6.6-8)?