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## 1 Timothy 6:6-8, 17-19 “Proper Attitudes toward Possessions”

Intro. When was the last time you lost your joy over material possessions? I read the story of a wife who drove to a full-service gas pump without realizing it. They pumped her gas for her, which seemed very nice of them. But then she realized that she paid 50 cents/gallon more. When she told her husband what happened, he got all bent out of shape over the extra \$7 she paid. That story is not about Steve & Cheryl!

Today, more and more people are loosing their jobs, or they are having to take a pay cut to stay on the job. If most people get upset over paying \$7 too much, think of how upset they will get if they have to take a pay cut over 10 times that much! Some are loosing sleep worrying about their economic well-being. If your life is wrapped up in material possessions, then you are in for some unhappy days ahead.

Last Sunday I began a new series of messages entitled, “Biblical Financial Principles for Tough Times.” Today and next Sunday I am going to preach two messages about the right and wrong attitudes toward possessions. Many people are interested in money & other possessions, but not as many are interested in having the proper attitudes toward money. As Christians we are certainly taught in the Word of God that we should have the right attitudes toward material possessions. If we have the right attitude, our actions are much more likely to be right as well. What I will say today and next Sunday will lay the foundation for everything else in this series.

I hope that you will listen carefully to this message, because if you will give heed to these Scriptures, you will be much happier in life, regardless of how much money you have. You can have peace and satisfaction regardless of what happens with the economy. But if you reject Paul’s teaching, you will end up rather unhappy, regardless of how much money you have.

This morning I want to share with you 3 positive attitudes that we should have toward our possessions. I think it is very significant what heads the list, for if you obey the first commandment here, everything else will fall into place.

### I. LET US BE CONTENT WITH OUR POSSESSIONS

Paul says in v.6, “Now godliness with contentment is great gain.” The word here used for contentment (*autarkeia*) was originally used by the stoic philosophers. By it they meant a complete sense of self-sufficiency. They believed that the best way to live was to be self-sufficient & independent of the ups and downs of life. But here it is given a Christian meaning. In contrast to the Stoic use, the “self” is not the origin or source of the sufficiency but merely the place where it is located. Christian contentment is intrinsically related to the sufficiency of God and Christ. Paul said in 2 Cor. 3:5, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves ..., but our sufficiency is from God.” The Lord told Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you” (2 Cor. 12:9). The believer is self-sufficient in the sense that he has his resources within him. Not only does the Lord provide our basic outward necessities, but he also provides the inward resources to be satisfied with whatever provision we have.

Notice that we are to be satisfied & content as long as we have the basic necessities of life. He says in v.8, “And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.” The word

“food” is sufficiently comprehensive to include all the articles of food that are necessary to support physical life, just as our word “clothing” indicates whatever is necessary for the outward protection of the body, including housing. We do not have to have luxuries to have joy & happiness. We do not need the latest & greatest of everything that comes out. We do not need an abundance of things to have joy. In a culture of consumption, we ought to pray for the grace to be able to say, “Give us the grace to know when enough is enough.”<sup>1</sup>

We should indeed be satisfied with whatever the Lord provides. Hebrews 13:5 says, “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’” As we saw last week, if you put God first in your life, He will surely provide for all your needs (Mt. 6:33). Philippians 4:11 says, “Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content.” But notice where such contentment & self-sufficiency comes from. Paul went on to say in v.13, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Contentment comes from an inward attitude to life. Contentment and satisfaction do not come from the abundance of our possessions. It is never in the power of things to bring happiness. Happiness always comes from personal relationships. All the things in the world will not make a man happy if he knows neither friendship nor love. Contentment comes when we escape the servitude to things, when we find our wealth in the love and the fellowship of men, and when we realize that our most precious possession is our friendship with God, made possible through Jesus Christ. Furthermore, if you cannot be satisfied with a little, don’t think that much more will bring satisfaction. Someone put it this way, “He who is not contented with what he has, would not be contented with what he would like to have.” [*Bulletin Digest*].

Are you content with what the Lord has provided, or do you complain about not having as much as someone else you know. Did you complain as recently as yesterday, or this morning? Well I want to challenge you to choose a life of contentment.

To help you, let’s example Paul’s 2 arguments as to why we should practice contentment. In v.6 he says “godliness with contentment is great gain.” The word translated “gain” (*porismos*) is a word that normally refers to financial gain, the acquisition of wealth. That is clearly the meaning in the previous verse. Do you see what Paul is saying? True riches are found in having godliness, and being content with whatever you have. To be discontent with little or much is to be poor in spirit, and certainly poor in happiness & joy. If you want to have true riches, pursue godliness & contentment. Psalm 37:16 says, “A little that a righteous man has is better than the riches of many wicked.”

Furthermore, in v.7 he gives another reason why we should be content, “For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.” The apostle is clearly thinking of Job’s famous saying, “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return” (1:21; cf. Ecc. 5:15). Every baby is born stark naked, and totally dependent upon another for life. When we die, we leave this world as we entered: not having anything & totally dependant upon Another for our life after death. Paul points out that material possessions are taken away from us upon our exit from this world. Thus, material things have no lasting significance. How foolish it is to put so much energy into things that have no lasting value. Be content with what you have, and concentrate upon the things that are permanent.

When you come to the end of our life and look back, you will certainly realize what was really important: your relationship with God, your family, your church family, & your friends.

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<sup>1</sup> William H. Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas, "Lord, Teach Us," *Christianity Today*, March 2009, p. 56

Material things will increasingly pale into insignificance. Until then, let us learn to be content with what we have, & reject a discontented complaining spirit.

Now a second attitude we should adopt is this:

## II. LET US BE THANKFUL FOR OUR POSSESSIONS

Notice in the last of v.17 that Paul says that we are “to trust ... in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.” Paul is addressing this primarily to “those who are rich in this present age....” You say, “Well, that leaves me out.” Probably not. Many of us are rich in comparison to the people in the third world, where the average person lives on what is equivalent to a few dollars/day. God has blessed us by living in one of the wealthiest countries on earth. By the way, notice how he distinguishes between those who are rich “in this age” and those who are truly rich.

Paul says in the last of v.17 that God “gives us richly all things to enjoy.” The gifts of God in creation are not merely for the support of human life; they are for us to enjoy. Many people who have great wealth do not enjoy what they have. On the other hand, there are some who have little, but through the Lord they are able to have great enjoyment with what little they have.

You know, you really don't need expensive things to experience happiness. Today children act like they have to have \$400 game consoles, and other expensive toys to be happy. They have to have expensive uniforms and \$200 alloy baseball bats, or \$150 cleats. When I was a child we would play hours with homemade toys or make-believe stick guns. We would use our imagination & be creative. We would find scrap wood & make a hut. I would play hours in the neighborhood creek, and enjoy God's little creatures like tadpoles, salamanders, and bullfrogs. We adult believers can have a great time just getting together for a time of fellowship. It really doesn't require a lot of money. God did not create food with a bland taste. There are many foods that give pleasure as well as nourishment. Even with a limited income, we can enjoy so many God-given pleasures, many of which cost very little. We in urban American need to rediscover the simple pleasures of nature: a beautiful sunset, a flowing stream that ripples over the rocks, a walk in the park. It doesn't take a lot to make a godly person happy & content, because true & lasting happiness comes from God, not the things of this world.

Yes, God has given all things for our enjoyment. This is just the opposite of the viewpoint that views possessions as unspiritual, or even sinful. In fact, look back at 4:3. There Paul spoke of false teachers who would be “forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods....” If God has ordained everything for enjoyment, the ascetic approach cannot be right.

Why would God give us material things to enjoy? First, to show us that He is good. But another purpose is to draw from us the attitude of thanksgiving. Paul goes on to say in 1 Timothy 4:3-4, “which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving.” When you have been blessed with some enjoyment from the material things of life, you should respond with an attitude of thanksgiving to God. Are you thankful for all that you have, or do you take such things for granted?

The story is told of a popular preacher who had a well dressed man come to him after one of the services where he preached about being thankful. And this man said to him, “Sir what you spoke about simply hasn't worked in my life.” So the preacher said, “Don't you have anything

to be thankful for.” He said, “No.” So the preacher took a piece of paper and drew a line down the middle and said, “On one side write down the things that are right in your life, that you can be thankful for, and on the other side, write down the things that are wrong in your life.” The man began to write and he wrote everything under the wrong column and nothing under the right column. So the preacher said, “You have nothing right, nothing to be thankful for?” He said, “Nothing.” So the preacher said, “Are you married?” “Yes.” “Then write down wife not dead.” He said, “Do you have a house to live in?” “Yes, I have a nice home.” “Has it burned down?” “No.” “Write house not burned down. Have you had a heart attack?” “No, I’m in good health.” “Write down, no heart attack. Good health. Do you have a job?” “Yes.” “You mean you haven’t lost your job?” “No.” “Write down haven’t lost job.” He just kept going with it. You know when we think about it and look at it, there is so much that every one of us has to be grateful for no matter what is happening externally.<sup>2</sup>

These two attitudes really go together. The more thankful you are, the more contented you will be. The more content you are, the more thankful you will be.

Now, let’s consider one other attitude we should have toward our possessions:

### III. LET US BE GENEROUS WITH OUR POSSESSIONS

Most of us have much more income than the minimum it takes just to have our basic necessities. What are you doing with the difference? Are you spending the difference on your own desires? Are you saving it up for your children to fight over some day? Well Paul says in the last of v.18 that we should be “ready to give, willing to share.” Two adjectives should describe our giving: liberal and generous. The word translated “give” (*eumetadotos*) actually can refer not just to giving, but giving well. It refers to liberal giving, especially for the purpose of meeting needs. The word “share” (*koinonikos*) literally means to have in common. It is taking what you have, and sharing it with those in need, so that you share the blessing. We should remember what Jesus said, “it is more blessed to give than to receive.” This includes giving to meet spiritual needs. We do that by giving to missions, and supporting our local evangelistic ministries.

But notice that the tone is moderate: there is no suggestion of the abandonment of wealth. After all, it takes money to make money, and if you give all of your money away, you would not be able to help anyone in the future.

Some rich people are content to simply give money. But that is not enough. You may feel you have discharged your duty to God & your fellow man simply by putting money in the offering plate, but Paul says in the first part of v.18, “Let them do good, that they be rich in good works....” If God has blessed us with wealth, that blessing involves certain obligations. Privilege involves responsibility. Riches are to be used to do good works. The teaching of the Christian ethic is, not that wealth is a sin, but that it is a very great responsibility. If a man’s wealth ministers to nothing but his own pride, and enriches no one but himself, it becomes his ruination, because it impoverishes his soul. Yet wealth should enable someone to do more good works, & more good than those with less wealth. So one responsibility of the wealthy is to be rich in good works. There are certain types of good works that require money, and a person of wealth is well suited for those types of good works. Notice they are to be as “rich” in good works as they are in money & possessions. Also, since the word is a present tense, they should keep on doing good deeds.

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<sup>2</sup> Dr. Fred Lowery, "How to Take Your Family through a Recession," January 25, 2009.

Paul gives a good reason why we should be generous with our possessions & time. If we are, we will be “storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.” Gifts are investments. By giving materially one enriches himself spiritually. This is true in this life, but especially in the ages to come. God will give eternal reward to those who do good works and share generously. Jesus said to a wealthy person, “Sell whatever you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven” (Mt 19:21). Your money won’t follow you to heaven, but something else will. Revelation 14:13 says, “Their works do follow them.” Heb. 6:10 says, “God is not so unjust as to overlook your work and the love which you showed for His sake in serving the saints, as you still do.” They also demonstrate by their good works and generosity that they are true children of God, and heirs of eternal life.

When you are given an opportunity to share your wealth or possessions with someone, how do you usually respond? Or do you find that you’re not usually open to sharing your resources with anyone?

Conclusion: In closing, I present to you two kinds of people with very different attitudes. On the one hand, imagine a person who frequently complains about what he doesn’t have, isn’t thankful for what he does have, and is a miser who doesn’t share what he does have. Do you see any joy in that person? On the other hand, imagine a person who is content with whatever God’s provides, and is thankful for every material blessing. He is generous in his giving. There is usually a smile on his face, and a spring in his step. Which person do you want to be?

God wants you to have the right attitude toward the material things of life. How can a person change from being a complaining, ungrateful miser to a contented, grateful giver? The first step is to trust God for salvation, and for day to day life. In v.17 Paul says we are not “to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.” When you understand that God is good, and when you trust in His provision, you can be content with what He provides, be thankful for what He provides, and really enjoy what He provides. And when you trust in God as your source, rather than your bank account, you are much more free to give to support His work, and meet the needs of others. If you have had a complaining, ungrateful, miserly attitude, it is time to confess that to God, repent of it, and trust God to enable you to change starting today!

Sources: William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Letters to Timothy, Titus, & Philemon* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975); Donald Guthrie, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: 1-II Timothy, Titus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1957); John MacArthur, Jr., *The Danger of Loving Money: Study Notes on 1 Timothy 6:6-21; James 5:1-6* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1989); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible [CD-ROM]* (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Donald A. Ward, *Commentary on 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus* (Waco: Word Books, 1974); Kenneth S. Wuest’s *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament: The Pastoral Epistles* in Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). Nothing available from Maclaren.

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