

+ 1 Timothy 6:6-12 + In Christ We Are Content + 19th Sunday after Pentecost + 4 October 2015 +

A wealthy businessman was vacationing at the beach. As he walked along the beach, he noticed a fisherman sitting lazily next to his boat. The rich man asked, "Why aren't you out there fishing?" "I've caught enough for today," the fisherman replied. "You know, you could catch more than you need," the rich man urged. "...But what would I do with them?"

"You could earn more money! You could buy a better boat so you could go deeper and catch more fish. You could purchase nylon nets, catch even more fish, and make more money. Soon you'd have a fleet of boats and you'd be rich like me." The fisherman asked, "Then what would I do?" "You could sit back and enjoy life!" "What do you think I'm doing right now?", the fisherman replied as he leaned back to look out at the sea once more.

We might chuckle a little at that story, but doesn't it seem like everyone is struggling to climb the ladder to success so they can "sit back and enjoy life"? Few ever get to that point. Usually the dream of contentment remains only that—a dream. Many of us think, "If I just get that promotion or buy that car or live in that place or save up that much money, I can sit back and relax." Yet the dream of contentment always seems just out of reach and eventually you look back on your life to see you spent it for nothing.

...But did you know you can still have contentment? It is possible to be content in this life. Paul helps us discover what true contentment is this morning as he teaches Timothy (and us) that **In Christ We Are Content**.

Before you can talk about contentment, you have to know what it is. Some years ago there was a song that defined contentment as *"not having what you want, but wanting what you've got."* Isn't that true? Real contentment is being satisfied with my situation in life—"wanting what I've got."

Yet the world around us wants you to focus on getting what you want. That means being dissatisfied with what you have and doing everything you can to make your life "better" even though it was fine before. For example, are you happy with the furniture in your home? Without raising hands, how many of you would like to replace some piece of furniture not because it's unusable, but because you'd like something "better"? The truth is, most of us probably would. Maybe you'd like a new car or a new game or a new outfit that's "better" than one you already have. These are minor examples, but they show how easily we become dissatisfied with what we have. Yet in the end, what does it accomplish? The car needs repairs. The game gets boring. The outfit wears out. Soon you "need" to "improve" your life again.

...**But being a little discontent can cause big problems.** It can be much more serious than you think. Paul writes, ***"For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."*** All it takes is a sinful desire for something that doesn't belong to you to lead to actions that end in ruin. If you're not content, it can lead to other sins.

Paul uses the desire to get rich as his example, but being discontent often involves more than just money. For example, in the Old Testament, we're told of a wicked king named Ahab. King Ahab really wanted a vineyard that rightfully belonged to a faithful believer named Naboth. Naboth's family had received that property when the Israelites first came into the land of Canaan several hundred years before. Naboth wouldn't give it to Ahab because he rightfully wanted to pass it on to his children. So rather than accept Naboth's explanation and move on, Ahab pouted like a spoiled child because he didn't get his way. Soon his sinful desire grew into sinful action. Ahab's wife Jezebel used her influence to ruin Naboth's reputation and then had him murdered, all because Ahab wasn't content with what he had.

Not being content with what God has given you can send you down a slippery slope of sin. For example, if you're discontent with what you have, you may be tempted to cheat on your taxes. If you're discontent with the toys you have, you might make a big fuss in the store or pester your parents constantly to get you that new toy. If you're discontent with your income, you may spend all your time working long hours, while removing yourself from time with the Lord. If you're discontent with your possessions, you might max out your credit cards. Such discontent is the reason why God gave us two commandments both condemning the same sin—***"You shall not covet!"*** The Lord knew that sinful desire is the source of every sinful action. That's why he is absolutely serious about our desires.

If I'm not content, I can fall into a deadly trap. Paul explains, ***"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."*** Being discontent with your situation in life or desiring what doesn't belong to you can end in ruin.

Discontent is like a snare or trap that can have deadly results. If you cheat on your taxes, that dishonesty can lead to jail time or heavy fines. If you're discontent with your toys, that new toy can quickly become boring and soon you demand still more new toys. If you spend all your time seeking that bigger paycheck, you can wander from the faith and lose out on the eternal prize. By maxing out your credit cards, you can cause a regular shortfall of money and **"pierce yourself with many griefs"** like worry and stress.

So how can you possibly find real contentment? The answer is much easier than you think. **Real contentment comes through Christ.** In him alone, you find satisfaction with what God gives you. In Christ, you find the key to contentment—godliness. How do you get such godliness with contentment? Paul tells us elsewhere, **"I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength."**

Did you catch the secret? The secret is **"through Christ."** Christ is the One who makes you godly and gives you real contentment. Christ earned that for you when he left the glories and riches of heaven to live a life of poverty on this earth. He earned it for you when he refused Satan's temptations to gain the wealth of all the earth. Then when he paid for the guilt of your discontent with his precious blood, he clothed you in his holiness before the holy God.

Jesus now changes your attitude about what you possess. In him, you find the source of all you have. Paul writes, **"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that."** The world and your sinful nature want you to devote your life to climbing the ladder to success and to spend your life trying to get things, but Christ changes that attitude. Through Jesus, you no longer try to find contentment by devoting your life to getting what you want, but by wanting what you've got. Through Jesus you can even find contentment in your situation in life, whether you're young or old, rich or poor, single or married, employed or unemployed, because in Christ you have everything.

We don't put our hope and security in wealth or earthly possessions, but in Christ, who promises that **"those who seek the Lord lack no good thing."** Jesus leads you to realize that all you have belongs to him, who gave it all to you as King David wrote, **"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it."** When you realize that, then the love of Christ motivates you to devote your time, your talents, your treasures to the Lord. In order to do this, you need to realize that not only does real contentment come through Christ, but **it does involve a struggle.**

Paul encourages Timothy, **"Fight the good fight of the faith."** Real contentment means fighting the good fight of faith. You may not realize it, but you are involved in a struggle for your soul right now. That struggle began the day you were baptized. Inside of you is a sinful nature that only wants to gratify its own selfish desires. Yet at your baptism, the Holy Spirit began to work through water and the Word to create inside you the desire to serve the Lord.

So there's a war going on inside of you. Your sinful nature wants to destroy your salvation like some ISIS terrorist. It wants to ensnare you in the trap of temptation and ruin you forever. It doesn't want you to be content with your life. Yet your new self, equipped by the Word, fights off that sinful nature every day and drowns it in the waters of your baptism. Nevertheless, your sinful nature keeps on swimming to continue fighting until the Lord brings you home to heaven. Yet in spite of your sinful nature's best efforts, your new self still helps you find contentment through faith in Jesus.

The struggle isn't just fighting off your sinful nature though. It also means pursuing what's really important. Paul encourages Timothy, **"But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness."** In this life, pursue such godly virtues. Seek to lead a life that pleases and honors God. Seek to grow in faith by regularly nurturing it with Word and Sacrament. Seek a self-sacrificing love that puts the desires of your Lord and neighbor ahead of your own. Pursue endurance in temptation and a gentle spirit as you deal with others, whether on the playground, in the classroom, at home, or at work.

As you pursue these godly virtues, Paul gives you good advice. **"Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses."** In this struggle, your eternal life is at stake. When you have godly contentment, it isn't riches or possessions that motivate you, but that final goal. That goal motivates you to use all that God has given you to carry out your service to him.

In the end, you can only have real contentment in Christ. Through Christ you can look at what God has given you and realize that all you have and all you are belongs to him. He changes your attitude and enables you to pursue what's really important. In him alone you receive the great gain that is so elusive in our world today because **in Christ, you are content.** Amen.