

The Great Gain of Godly Detachment - contentment in an ephemeral life

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Date: 25 November 2018

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn now to our Bible reading. Once again, we're in Paul's first letter to Timothy and reading this morning in the first half of chapter 6.

Beginning of chapter 6, you'll see from the paragraphing in our church Bibles, if you have one of those, it's page 993. It's a sort of bridge section. It rounds off chapter 5, dealing with the appropriate honor that's to be shown to different groups of people in the church, older and younger, men and women, those who teach as fathers, as mothers, as sisters, as brothers.

But also, it's a bridge into this final chapter, which in many ways sums up and gets to the heart of the instruction and the teaching of this letter. So we're going to read this morning verses 1 to 10.

Let all who are under yoke as slaves or as bond servants regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled.

Those who are believing masters must not be disrespectful on grounds that they are brothers. Rather, they must serve all the better, since those who benefit by their good service are believers and beloved.

[1 : 21] Or it might be that we should translate that since they are beloved and believing brothers who themselves do good service along with you.

Teach and urge these things. If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound, the healthy words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, anyone does not agree with this?

He's puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth.

Imagining that godliness is a means of gain. Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment. 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.

[2 : 43] 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.

Amen. Amen. And may God bless to us his word. Amen. Well, let's turn to 1 Timothy and chapter 6.

As we've seen, if the church is going to win the world for Christ, then of course it must guard both its gospel message and its manner. And therefore the church must have a healthy ministry.

So the heart of the letter has been calling the churches in Ephesus back to that ministry that will do that, guarding real godliness and guarding the real gospel for the church's mission to the world.

It was an urgent need because lots had already gone wrong. And very serious instruction was needed. And we've seen all the way through how that happens in this letter.

[3 : 54] Now in chapter 6 we have a final word of encouragement and also of warning. To Timothy, it's very personal. But it's also a very public one to the whole church.

It's a word for him. It's a word he does need. But it's also a word the whole church needs. Look at the end, verses 20 and 21. It's very personal. Oh Timothy, you guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

That is the apostolic gospel and all its implications. Notice the last line. Grace be with you all. It's a plural you.

Grace be with you. He would have said were he writing to the church in Glasgow. So we'd know. And so Timothy is being told that through him the whole church has got to do what verse 20 here says.

Guard the deposit that's given to him. The faith. Verse 21. The true apostolic Christianity. Guard that and negatively avoid the falsehood.

[4 : 57] The babble and the contradictions of these rivals who are peddling a false gospel. Always two sides of the same coin, isn't it? You can't guard the truth without at the same time avoiding error.

That necessary negative is always essential for a positive gospel ministry as we've seen. And the charge also sums up the whole letter.

But it sums up this last chapter as well. Because the first half of the chapter in chapter 6. Paul is exposing that false teaching. Telling him what to avoid.

And then from verse 11 and following. He's telling him what he's got to pursue instead. Look at verse 11. As for you, flee these things. That's verses 1 to 10.

And instead pursue, verse 12, something very different. Fight the fight for the true faith. For eternal life. So what are these things that Timothy is to flee?

[5 : 56] Well, we've already seen, haven't we, what some of these rivals were teaching. In chapter 1, we saw that there were confident teachers. Utterly confident of themselves.

But actually, says Paul, totally ignorant of what the whole Bible is really about. The saving plan of God. That's why they weren't interested in evangelism outside the church. But they were focusing inwardly on spiritual elitism within the church.

In chapter 4, we saw that they had strange ideas of spirituality. Sort of asceticism. Finding a superior spirituality by avoiding certain foods and so on.

By avoiding marriage and things like that. But here in chapter 6, we at last get to, I think, the very heart of it all. And Paul tells us here that the nub of it was that these men were greedy for material gain.

Verse 5. They imagined godliness as a means of gain. Verse 9. They desired to be rich. That is, rich in the things of this world.

[6 : 59] You might think that's hard to fit with the asceticism of chapter 4. But that's often the way, isn't it, when the Christian message is corrupted. Sometimes those who take vows of chastity for a sort of superior spiritual vocation.

In fact, they turn out to be the most sexually ravenous people there are. And often those in the Christian church who are most vehemently opposed to one kind of indulgence or whatever it is, are highly indulgent in all sorts of other ways.

And that's the contradictions, isn't it, of false spirituality. But at any rate, Paul tells us that clearly material gain, a desire for wealth, was a real issue in these Ephesian churches.

And no doubt, of course, the power, the influence that tends to go with wealth. Now, Ephesus was a very affluent society. And the church clearly had wealthy people in it, as well as slaves, as we'll see.

And the church itself had a lot of money. But we've seen already it wasn't necessarily spending it very well. There were people who should have been supported, who weren't being. People who were being supported, who shouldn't be.

[8 : 07] The widows, the church leaders, and so on. So it's easy to see how problems could arise. Both among those who had wealth, but especially perhaps among those who didn't have it, but wanted to have it.

Maybe some of the slaves, the bond servants, resenting their lack. Maybe some of the leaders pursuing wealth that they themselves didn't have. And these attitudes, no doubt, were being fueled and being stirred up by leaders who had worldly motivations.

And who were very dangerous, therefore, for the whole church. And indeed for Timothy himself. Now, don't be mistaken, Paul's word is also here for Timothy personally. There's very strong language of warning for him.

And that just tells us, doesn't it, that even godly and good Christian workers, even Christian leaders, are not immune from the lures of gain in this material world.

2 Timothy chapter 4, Paul tells us about one of his other former colleagues, a man called Demas, who deserted him. Paul says, why? Because he was in love with this present world.

[9 : 13] And he contrasts him with those who rather love the appearance of Christ. That is, they're longingly, lovingly waiting for the return of Jesus Christ.

It's these ones that Paul says who will receive at last the crown of righteousness and eternal life. Not those who love this present world. And therefore are no longer living truly for Christ.

And that's the stark contrast that we see here in 1 Timothy chapter 6. Paul's saying to Timothy, will you be a man of the world, corrupted by riches, which in fact will all fade away in the end?

Or will you be a man of God, who will receive the crown of righteousness, which will never spoil or fade? Will you swerve into ruin, into everlasting loss, verse 9?

Or will you be saved into righteousness and into everlasting life, verse 12? That's the contrast. Paul couldn't be starker, couldn't be sharper.

[10 : 17] But he has to speak so plainly, he has to speak so shockingly because people have been fooled. They haven't seen that real danger. Because these kind of influences chime so easily with the culture all around, with the air that they breathe, with the instincts that they most naturally follow.

Because we live in this passing world. And it's so easy to treat this world as all there is, as the permanent world, just like everybody else all around us does. And in an affluent society, in a comfortable society like the one we live in today, then we also need to be jolted sometimes, don't we?

To see things as they really are. And so Paul's challenge in the two halves of this chapter are very striking, very stark, very salutary for us. And we need them just as much as the first heroes did in the first century.

This chapter is shouting aloud to all of us today, and it's saying this, don't live like fools for what is futile, for what's passing, for ephemeral gain. Live the faith for what's permanent, for what's future, for what is eternal gain.

Flee from that false, that corrupted faith, and follow instead the true Christian faith. Don't be a sideways looking church, coveting all around this world's things.

[11 : 42] No, crave what is truly permanent. Be a forward looking church. Take hold of that which is truly life, eternal life. Don't capitulate to this world.

Contend for the kingdom of God. Be content with everything that is just passing, just ephemeral. That's the message of verses 1 to 10.

But be contending for what is eternal and what is permanent. That's the message of verses 11 to 19. Well, we'll look at the second half of the chapter next time.

But this morning, let's focus on verses 1 to 10. And on the real secret, the real knowledge. That is in stark contrast, actually, to the covetous so-called knowledge of the false teachers.

The real key, says Paul, the real knowledge that you need for life is all about contentment. It's all about the true gain, the great gain that comes only from a godly detachment in this present world.

[12 : 46] Because we're longing for the true world, the world that is to come. So I want to look at it under three headings. Confusion, corruption, and contentment.

First of all, in verses 1 and 2, the real confusion that there was among Christians. Verses 1 and 2 show us some of the effects of the false teaching in the churches. Which was that some of the Christian slaves, the bond servants, were actually living in such a way as caused the gospel to be reviled by their disrespectful behavior.

And the root of the problem was confusion. Confusion between the ephemeral and the eternal. Between the passing and the permanent. And Paul says, don't confuse this passing world with the permanent world, which is not yet here, which awaits the return of Christ.

Meantime, you must keep your focus on that future reality. And you must serve, all of you together now, for that goal. So that the gospel is not reviled, but so that it's beautified in this world.

And so that by doing that, the whole church is blessed as it walks through this passing world. So he says in verse 1, Christian slaves, bond servants, must properly honor their masters.

[14 : 02] As I said, this section rounds off the discussion in chapter 5, which is centered around honoring properly different groups of people. But it's a bridge into this last chapter.

Notice how in verses 24 and 25 of chapter 5, the focus there is on good works or, by contrast, on sins, which will ultimately be revealed for what they truly are at the final judgment.

Because they either have or haven't served what is really important, what will really last, the eternal kingdom of God in Christ. And in verse 2 here, that also is the same focus, isn't it, of the good service that's in view.

It must have been difficult for Christian slaves, even though, of course, their lives were really quite good. They were not really like slaves as we think of it, but they were household servants, like members of the extended family.

They had a lot of freedom. That's no doubt why many of them were able to go and to attend churches and to find faith in Jesus Christ. But still, they weren't like free Roman citizens.

[15 : 07] So there was a tension, inevitably, within the churches. Because the gospel says, doesn't it, there is no longer any slave or free. We're all one in Christ Jesus.

But, of course, there were still slaves and free in Ephesus, just as today. There are rich and poor. There are clever and dull. There are healthy and sick.

There are all the things that, in this fallen world, still await the liberation of the bondage to decay that we know in this passing world. And, of course, it's likely that these false teachers in Ephesus were sowing even more confusion by their teaching that, in fact, as they said, the resurrection has already happened.

So we're to live as though there are no longer any of these distinctions anymore on this earth. No, no, no, says Paul. No, no, you are to keep the gospel free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus, he says in chapter 6, verse 14.

Because only then will all of these things finally be changed and put to rights. So the gospel is not to foment social revolution in that wrong way.

[16 : 18] And the church's challenge is not to devote itself to these temporary social changes, but rather it's to devote itself to spreading the word of salvation to all.

Because that's the only way, in the end, that this world will be permanently changed, as it will. And, of course, as the influence of the gospel spreads in the meantime, well, actually, that is what brings many, many betterments in so many ways.

And it was, wasn't it, where Christianity began to be most influential, that so many of the social evils and ills were banished, including slavery. Slavery exists today only in cultures that have not been touched by the Christian faith.

But, of course, we as Christians are not to confuse, says Paul, the ephemeral and the eternal. No. We're not ever to put our desire for gains in this present world above the real priority for ourselves and for others, which is eternity.

And we need to remember that we are living in time but for eternity. And that is what matters above all other things. So a slave, if his Christian witness, when he becomes a believer, is to be disrespectful, to be insubordinate, what's that going to do for the cause of the gospel?

[17 : 40] Well, verse 1 tells us. It'll be reviled. It'll be blasphemed in the world, not beautified in the world. That's just the same today, isn't it? If you become a Christian, and the first thing you start to do at work is ignoring your boss, doing as you please, slacking off, well, what's he going to think?

No more Christians in this office. That's what he'll think. Quite right. No, no, no. You are to be, as a Christian, the best worker in your office in order to serve the gospel.

Peter says just the same thing, doesn't he, in 1 Peter 2. Even, he says, if your master is unfair, if he's unjust, and you suffer wrongly. Because, he says, that's a gracious thing in God's sight because you are following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And that kind of submissive service is, ultimately, service to God. He wrote the same thing to the Ephesian church in his letter to the Ephesians, in chapter 6, where he says that slaves who serve well are really serving Christ.

And God will reward them for that. But here in verse 2, if you look, he says, all the more so if your master is actually a Christian. Why? Well, because they're brothers.

[18 : 52] So far from taking advantage of your brother, oh, he's a Christian brother. I can be a slacker. I don't have to bother for him. No, no, no, no, no. It's the opposite, says Paul. Look, he is a brother in Christ. He's beloved.

So you're to serve him all the better. And in serving him, he is blessed and you are blessed. It might be, as I said, that verse 2 should be translated differently, that they're to serve all the better, since the masters are believers and beloved, and that they also devote themselves to good service.

And I guess that just makes it even clearer that Paul's real emphasis here is that all together, whoever they are, master or servant, they are to all be servants of Christ and his everlasting kingdom, striving to be the best servants they can for the church and for its mission to the world, the eternal gospel.

That's the service that really matters. That's the good service. That's the labor and striving. That's the every good work that we are to be rich in, that we've seen all the way through the chapters of this letter.

Striving for the kingdom that is eternal and permanent, not striving merely for this passing ephemeral world. Ours is a communion, a fellowship, a partnership, which is focused on striving together as the church, made up of all kinds of people, but not seeking just to benefit ourselves or to better ourselves, but to serve Christ, to beautify the gospel in this world, so that the gospel will be heard and seen.

[20 : 30] And it will transform this world forever. It's only when all of us are actually doing that, forward looking, with our eyes on eternity, not sideways looking, looking around about, bettering ourselves, it's only then that it will be, as Paul says to the Philippians, that we are firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.

But if a church is confused about the ephemeral and the eternal, if it focuses chiefly on this passing world, on seeking a sort of social revolution above other things, with a gospel that's just about this world, not about the eternal world, that church will end up on the rocks of ruins, says Paul.

It won't change the world, because the only thing that can change the world, and change human behavior, is the spirit of Christ in the heart, born through this gospel. And it won't rescue any from this present life, for that world to come.

That's a fact of history, isn't it? That where the social gospel has prevailed, then very quickly it degenerates into mere socialism, and there's no gospel left at all.

Nothing of Christ. But that is, of course, not at all to say that the church is to be casual in its attitudes, to the desires for wealth that there may be in this world.

[22 : 00] Remember Peter Mandelson, that great socialist, saying that he was quite relaxed about people wanting to become filthy rich. No, no, no, says Paul. If the gospel is not to be a social gospel, nevertheless, we must be absolutely clear what we are not to be striving for.

And that brings us to the heart of this passage, which is really about the real corruption that there was in these churches in Ephesus. Verses 3 to 10 expose for us here, don't they? The heart of these false teachers themselves.

And it was in them a craving for the ephemeral above things that are eternal. And Paul's message is especially clear. Don't be corrupted by this world's riches.

Don't live for fleeting gain, for ephemeral things. It's not just foolish. It doesn't deliver in the present the things you think it will. It's also absolutely fatal.

Paul says, it will destroy you in the end. So Timothy, he says, is to teach and urge these things, verse 3, the healthy truths of real Christianity, because leaders in these very churches have been teaching something quite different.

[23 : 13] And the behavior in these churches already has become corrupted in a shocking way. And remember, these are churches that Paul himself founded just a few years before.

These are the churches where Paul spent the longest period of his Bible teaching ministry in the book of Acts. And if that's not a salutary word to any church that takes Bible teaching ministry seriously, I don't know what it is.

But Paul foresaw this, didn't he, back in Acts chapter 20? He warned them. Why? Well, because he knew the power of cultural pressure. And he knew the weakness of the sinful human heart.

And he knew the power of the devil himself to corrupt and to destroy. What does the devil do always to corrupt human beings? Well, he twists the truth of God, doesn't he?

And he sells us a lie. He presents human beings with a different truth. Verse 3, do you see? A different doctrine. Quite the opposite of the sound and healthy words of the Lord Jesus Christ.

- [24 : 19] So instead of the healthy words of Jesus that lead to godliness, that lead to obedience to his commands, the false leaders under Satan swear, suggesting, well, look at the end of verse 5, that real godliness is all about gain.

That is, earthly gain. Gain now in material, measurable, tangible ways. What they're saying is, a piece of good-looking fruit in the hand now is worth much more than any promise of God for the future.

You see, it's a lie as old as man himself, isn't it? It goes right the way back to the Garden of Eden. Now, notice what Paul says here. To reject the apostle's gospel, to reject his gospel, is to reject, verse 3, the word of Christ himself.

It's the teaching. There is only one. It's the truth, verse 5. It's the faith, verse 10. It's the deposit that Paul has given to Timothy, verse 20.

It's the faith, once for all, delivered to the saints, as Jude calls it, through the apostles of Christ. 2 Peter, chapter 3, verse 2. The command of our Lord and Savior that comes through your apostles.

- [25 : 37] That was the great commission, wasn't it? Jesus said to his church, and particularly to his apostles, go into all the world and make disciples, teaching them to obey everything that I have taught you.

Because in the upper room, remember, Jesus told his apostles that after his ascension, when the Spirit came, he would come to lead them, the apostles, into all truth.

He would remind them, he said, of everything Jesus taught them while he was on earth. And he would add to that revelation, telling them things that were yet to come. So that the church would have, complete, along with the Old Testament scriptures and the apostolic witness, a full and a final revelation of the things of God.

Everything that we need for life and godliness until the Lord Jesus comes again, as Peter puts it in his second letter. So to reject the apostles, to teach a different message from Paul and the others, is to reject the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's so important for us to be clear about that, isn't it? Today, when you hear people saying, well, I don't like this that Paul says, I don't like that that Paul says, I'll just stick with what Jesus says. No, if you reject Paul, you reject Jesus Christ.

- [26 : 55] And Paul's gospel is a gospel that is unmistakably focused on the future, on eternity, on Christ our hope, on craving that eternal life that we are called to, on taking firm hold of that, as he says here in verse 12, that which is truly life, he calls it in verse 19.

Craving the glory of a world that is yet to come, not coveting the gains of this passing world. That's the true teaching of the Christian gospel.

It promises an eternal glory. It does not promise or proffer ephemeral gain now in this world. And the Lord Jesus himself said it, didn't he?

What does it profit a man if he gain the whole wide world and forfeit his own life, the life that is truly life? But the falsehood, this rejection of the eternal gospel, the true gospel is exposed by its results, by what it does produce.

The gospel that offers great gain for the church and for the Christian in this world. What does it actually produce? Well, look at verses 4 and 5 here. It's not a healthy picture.

- [28 : 18] In fact, it's a horrible picture. Here is not a church full of wonderful, godly relationships produced by this gospel. Here's a church full of grim relationships. Look, controversy, quarrels about words, envy, slander, evil suspicions, constant frictions.

That gospel produces a church full of rancor and division. And alas, that is not too uncommon, is it, in professing churches of Jesus Christ today?

Paul's saying there is plain folly in this kind of gospel that promises great gain, but in fact does not deliver anything that it promises. In fact, it does the very opposite.

Just like it did back in Eden. What did the serpent promise? The wisdom of God, the wealth of God. What did it reap? Only the wrath of God. And so the results already evident are enough to expose the reality about such a different gospel.

Their so-called knowledge, Paul says, is utterly false. It's a babble of contradictions. And those who peddle it here in verse 4, look, actually they understand nothing.

[29 : 30] They are ignorant. Verse 5, do you see they are depraved in mind and they are deprived of the truth. Isn't that frightening? You begin to swerve away from the truth of God and ultimately you are deprived even of the truth that you once had by God himself.

That's what Jesus himself says. Even that which they have will be taken away. That's a terrible result.

And that goes much, much further, doesn't it, than the mere rancor and ruin it causes in the church now. It's ruin, it's destruction in the end, says Paul. For those professing Christians who follow that deceptive gospel that is all about this world.

Look at verses 9 and 10. These are words of stark warning. This path isn't just a path of folly. It doesn't deliver. It's fatal. It will destroy you, says Paul.

This is the road to hell. Verse 9, those who desire to be rich in this world's term, they fall into temptation. They fall into a snare, the devil's snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.

[30 : 49] It's the path of addiction, isn't it? Appetites that become insatiable and in the end become inescapable and lead ultimately to death.

And this love of money, verse 10, the love of the material, the craving for the things of this world. Things that lead you to be, like Demas, in love with this world.

It's the road away, do you see, from the faith, from the only truth that leads to salvation. And it's the road, says Paul, to piercing and many pangs.

It's the road away from heaven, away from the home of eternal righteousness. And it's the home, it's the road to the home of eternal ruin, to destruction, to piercing with many pangs.

It's the road to hell, is what he's saying. But look, the seeds of that terrible destruction, Paul says, lie way back in the very desires deep in the human heart for gain in this world's terms.

[31 : 53] Those who desire fall into temptation and ultimately are plunged into destruction. What does James say in his letter?

Desire, when it is conceived, gives birth to sin, and sin, when it's fully grown, brings forth death. Because as Jesus himself says, you cannot serve God and mammon, this world's riches.

You'll love the one and you'll hate the other. It's just folly to strive for gain in this world. Verse 7 tells us, doesn't it?

We take nothing out of this world. He's quoting Ecclesiastes chapter 5. Remember, that whole book, when we studied it, is about the folly of chasing material gain as if it were of lasting value.

You might as well be chasing the winds, says the preacher. Where does that lead to? It leads to vexation, to sickness, and anger, was his mantra. Just like verse 4 here, he's describing.

[33 : 01] But it's not just folly, Paul says. It's far worse than that. It is fatal. It leads only to ever worse ruin and destruction. It leads away from the truth.

It leads away from what is truly life, eternal life. Go back this afternoon and have a read of Luke's gospel chapter 12.

You'll see it begins with Jesus' warning against the leaven of the Pharisees who were lovers of money, lovers of this world's power and praise and wealth. And he says that influence so easily infects you.

And he goes on to say, be on your guard against all forms of covetousness. For one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions in this world's terms.

And then he goes on to tell that famous story, doesn't he, of the rich fool, the man who spent his whole life craving, filling his barns with this world's gains only to face God's ultimate judgment on the last day saying, you fool.

[34 : 08] All that you amassed is gone now, isn't it? And you have nothing because your life had no riches towards God.

These words, friends, they're a stark warning to all of us because we too, we live in an affluent society like they did. And we also are just as susceptible. We're often just as naive as these first century Christians.

We don't realize, do we, the danger that we're in. The church in Ephesus was oblivious. That's why Paul had to send Timothy to them. That's why he had to write this letter. They were so affected by their culture all around them, they didn't realize that they were being led astray because the teachings that they were receiving were so acceptable to them.

That's what Paul says in 2 Timothy 3, in the last days people will be lovers of money, lovers of themselves. So of course they won't endure sound teaching that offends them, but they'll gather around themselves teachers who say exactly what their own itching ears are quite delighted to hear.

And with great ease, therefore, they're led off to wonder into myths and ultimately into ultimate ruin. that's exactly what we see today, isn't it?

[35 : 25] All over the world today, especially in the developing world, especially in countries like Africa, people want to hear about wealth, about prosperity. What are the largest churches? The ones that promise exactly these things.

People want to hear about health and healing, don't they? So they'll flock to churches that'll promise you that. in our post-Christian West where gain and influence and respect in our culture among the movers, the shakers, the opinion formers, it comes to those who embrace the mores of our day, don't they?

Doesn't it? Feminism, homosexuality, transgenderism, now all of these sorts of things. People who want to gain the praise of this world and our society, like so many, alas, in our mainline churches, well, of course, they will give a gospel that will bless.

All of these things that the world wants to hear. It's just like the state-approved church in countries like China. Well, those churches must approve the state and the Communist Party.

Of course they must. But beware, says Paul, of the desire for this world's gain, of the love for this material world.

[36 : 37] It's a root of all kinds of evils and it's a road, he says, that leads only to ultimate destruction. We must neither limit what Paul means by riches here to mere money, nor, of course, must we ignore the very real greed for monetary wealth that there is in our hearts, deep and pervasive and corrosive within us so often.

Notice also that it's not that Paul says here having riches is a root of all kinds of evil, it's desiring these riches. And very often it's those who don't have them but who want them that are far more corrupted by wealth than those who actually have them.

Although, as we'll see next time, those who do have them have very significant responsibilities. But envy and the politics of envy is an ugly thing. And Paul says we have to flee from that.

And sometimes that might mean we have to just give away a good lot of what we actually have because it might be beginning to obsess us and to consume us. If your wallet is leading you into sin says Jesus if I can paraphrase chop it off better to enter heaven walletless than go wallet intact into hell.

I'm quite serious sometimes sometimes people's savings their investments become an obsession for them. Whether they've got a lot or whether they don't have a lot well sometimes the only answer then is to get rid of what you do have before it kills you and corrupts you.

[38 : 14] Maybe some of you this morning here are getting all stressed out already about your Christmas shopping and buying all your presents all stressed out about your Christmas dinner and getting all of those things. Maybe what you need to do is forget about all of that.

Double or treble or quadruple your Christmas offering and be liberated for what Christmas is actually about the eternal gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ not a face feeding frenzy of materialistic nonsense.

But this world offers many many beguiling riches to us. Today in our society very often those riches are framed in terms of sexual gain and riches aren't they?

How attractive a gospel that says God wants you to be rich. God wants you to be rich sexually now in the way you want it. There's no need to wait. Don't deprive yourself of all these good gifts.

God wants you to be rich in who you are the way you want to be. Expressing yourself in the way that makes you feel good about yourself and your identity.

[39 : 21] God wants you to have your heart's desire now in any way you want. Don't let a few ancient texts get in your way. God wants you to be rich. And on and on it goes.

See friends Satan has only got one song but my goodness has he not learned to sing it well in any culture in any age to fan into flame any sinful desire that he can find deep in our hearts.

But those desires those cravings and covetings for gain for the beguiling of riches of this world they are says Paul the root of all kinds of evils.

Because it's the root of all sin isn't it? Romans chapter 1 it exchanges the truth of God for a lie and so we worship we desire not the creator but created things.

Not the eternal world but this ephemeral world. And to think that you can live for both of these worlds is just a lie.

[40 : 27] You cannot serve God and material things says Jesus. And if you believe that lie you will find it does not deliver.

It won't lead you to satisfaction and contentment in life it will lead you to dissatisfaction and discontent. But far worse says Paul it will in the end lead you to ruin and ultimate destruction.

It will lead you to hell. So what's the answer for confused Christians living in a fallen world and often as we are surrounded by corruptions of the church's gospel to lead us away into error to confuse us to corrupt us.

Well Paul says the answer and the only answer lies in real contentment in Christ. Verses 6-8 show us the way of escape don't they?

Back to solid gospel reality. Contentment with everything that is ephemeral and passing because we have the true key to what is eternal what is permanent to that which is truly life.

[41 : 41] Which is not some seductive secret so called knowledge that comes from those who have corrupted the truth it's simply the public truth of the true gospel of Jesus of Christ our hope.

of a salvation that lies still in the future to come at the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ. We know that our whole life now and forever is in his hands.

And we know that it isn't until his appearing that we will have all of these things and we know that in the meantime what he tells us to do is to keep that command that true gospel beyond reproach to live now building up a good foundation for the future.

Because we know friends don't we that it's not the material wealth that we have that will ever enter that eternal life but it is the men and women that we have become.

Verse 7 because we brought nothing into this world we can't take anything out of it except except verse 6 our godliness.

[42 : 48] Do you see? the inner man that Paul speaks about in Ephesians 3 what Christ has done in us and with us by his spirit not the material things but what we have become that alone is what will pass through God's judgment either to come forth as gold or as Paul says elsewhere to suffer loss.

And that's why the great gain indeed the only gain in life is godliness because we saw back in chapter 4 verse 8 didn't we Paul says godliness alone holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

And the other side you see of living with a godly determination for that permanent life in the eternal world is living with a godly detachment in this passing life in this ephemeral world which is why in verse 6 godliness and contentment go together.

contentment is the only real gain because you have a proper godly detachment from this world not despising it wrongly not becoming ascetic nor desiring it wrongly not becoming greedy.

That's the contradiction isn't it of all false gospels false spiritualities they turn everything upside down turn the truth of God into a lie. That's the way of the man of the world he doesn't thank God for all the gifts God does give him and he desires and covets all the things that God hasn't given him totally upside down but real contentment comes from a knowledge of the true God and he is the one who teaches us how to live in time for eternity how to live in this ephemeral world for the eternal world whether we've got little or indeed whether we've got much that's what Paul himself had learned he says that to the Philippian church I've learned in whatever circumstances I am to be content I've found the secret he says facing hunger or plenty abundance or need what's the secret there's no secret it's just knowing the true God says Paul who strengthens me who enables me to live that way and it's knowing that the real game the real prize is the upward call of God in Christ Jesus everything that lies ahead in heaven in the eternal world just exactly like here he's filled with with a godly determination for the world to come and so he can follow a godly detachment from the world round about us absolutely content to thank God for all the things he does have food and clothing and so on verse 8 and meats and marriage and all the things that God does give but utterly free of coveting what God hasn't given now because well all of these things are passing and only the future is permanent

[45 : 43] Paul's telling us there are only two ways to live in this world as professing Christians we can try to live for this ephemeral world and it will be a life of covetous discontent it will not lead you to health it will lead to vexation and sickness and anger it will fill the church with rancor and division now and it will lead only to ruin and destruction in the end or we can live wholeheartedly for the eternal world with a contented detachment in God our Savior and Christ our hope and in fact we will find in that road the road to real joy even now in this life but also joy in abundance forever the blessing even now of a God who does richly provide us with all things to enjoy and who blesses us all the more as we are liberated to become givers and not getters those who know that it's more blessed to give than to receive but also above all the blessing of true godliness which holds promise not just for this passing life but also for the permanent life the life to come which alone is truly life that's the answer friends to living in time for eternity godliness with contentment that's the great gain says Paul that's the only gain that's worth living for well let's pray there is great gain in godliness with contentment and so almighty god who alone can order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men grant unto us your people that we may love the thing you command and desire that which you promise that so amid the sundry and manifold changes of this passing world our hearts may be firmly fixed where true joys are to be found in your everlasting kingdom through jesus christ our lord amen have to be found in time and that going well now the one is that that we know you