

Godliness with Contentment

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But godliness with contentment is great gain.
1 Tim 6:6

The love of money is wrong and it causes all kinds of problems. By contrast godliness with contentment is not only good, but it's a "great gain" (v. 6).

But that only leads to a pressing question: how do we know if we are truly content? After all, I might think that I am quite content, also when it comes to financial and material things, but I might be fooling myself. Is there a way to accurately assess our contentment level?

The apostle Paul gives us two reference points to test how content we are. The first one comes in verse seven: "for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world." Are we sufficiently aware of this seemingly obvious fact? At birth each one of us came into this world naked and empty-handed. We did not come from our mother's womb with clothes on our little bodies. Neither did we come into this world carrying books, or electronic gadgets, or keys to a car, let alone keys to a house. We were born with precisely nothing in our hands.

That is also the way it will be when we die. In stark contrast to ancient Egyptian burial practices, we cannot take our favorite chunks and clumps of mammon along with us. When we die we will take along with us precisely the same inventory of stuff that we brought into the world, that is to say, nothing.

Now if you consider the (rather long?) list of material blessings that the LORD has given you at this moment in your life, and you compare that to the nothing, which you brought into the world and will take out of this world, suddenly your present inventory of blessings starts to look pretty big, doesn't it? Keeping this basic truth in the front of our minds has a way of also keeping us truly content.



How do we know if we are truly content?



Then in verse eight the apostle adds something else, another test if you wish. Be prepared, this is a very hard verse to swallow. "If we have food and clothing, with these we will be content." Really? We could work with it much easier if the apostle had said, "If we have food and clothing, with these we will survive." We can wrap our heads and hearts around that, even though it's hard.

For example, think of times of war or persecution. Sometimes children of God must flee, with only some clothes on their bodies and some food that they can scrounge up here or there. Their houses, their cars, their businesses, their bank accounts... they need to leave it all behind. And yet they

survive. So, if they do it, by the grace of God, we should be able to do it, too.

However, the Holy Spirit did not prompt the apostle to use the word “survive.” Instead, the Spirit breathed into him the phrase “with these we will be content.” That is a much higher standard to reach.

Yes, even though it might not seem like it, we can survive without electronic gadgets—no laptop, no tablet, no smartphone. At least we can do this for a one or two weeks in a campground on summer vacation. Some of us might even enjoy a complete break from our digital addictions. But would we be content if we had no electronic gadgets at all, 24/7/365? Honestly, I have a hard time saying that I would be. How about you?

What if we had no means of transportation, other than our own two feet—no car, no bike, no bus pass. Oh, we’d find a way to survive. But would we be content? I’m having a hard time imagining how I would be content without my car. How about you?

What if we had no bank account with a bit of a rainy-day fund in it. Wouldn’t that raise our level of anxiety and diminish our level of contentment?

But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. We can read those inspired words in 1 Timothy 6. We can understand them without much difficulty. But I’m having a hard time swallowing them. What about you?

All this to say, that the love of money is a much more real and present temptation in our lives than we might first think. This also means that we might not be quite as content as we first thought.

Then again, consider it Christo-centrally. As our Saviour lived and worked for our salvation, here on this earth, what did he have so far as material blessings are concerned? He had food and he had clothing. In the Father’s providence, a very generous group of women took care of that (Luke 8:3). But beyond food and clothing, what did he have? He did not own a house. He did not own a first-century car, otherwise known as a donkey. After all, he had to borrow one for his triumphal entry.

So, our Master Jesus Christ lived out in reality what the apostle Paul is writing about to Timothy. Christ had food and clothing, but not much beyond that. And he was content—perfectly content. Well, out of thankfulness for the eternal salvation that he has gained for us, is it too much for him to ask that we would also be content, even if we only had food and clothing? After all, a servant is not greater than his Master, is he?



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