

Godly Gain

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[0 : 0 0] series on the first letter of Paul to Timothy and let's pray. God our Father speak to us from your word now we pray, rebuke us, correct us, teach us and train us in righteousness that we may be wise for salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ and in his name we pray. Amen.

Now is the winter of our discontent. Here we are all rugged up, scarves, hats, beanies, gloves, warm clothes.

It's winter, no dispute about that. Is this the winter of our discontent? Margaret Thatcher endured a winter of discontent when she was Prime Minister of England.

Well at least the people of England were discontented with her. So John Steinbeck wrote a novel on that expression, the winter of our discontent and of course the line comes from Shakespeare from the beginning of Richard III as I'm sure you all know.

Now is the winter of our discontent. Discontent with what? Well discontent with our lot in life, discontent with our pay, discontent with Iraq, both the war and the football, discontent with climate change, discontent with the drought or the floods, discontent with friends or family or relationships or exam results.

[1 : 3 0] Discontentment actually is rife. Not only the winter of our discontent but it will be followed by the spring and the summer and the autumn of our discontent. Unless we change radically.

Because discontentment is a fundamental part of our world and the society in which we live. You see, the discontentment is expressed in all sorts of different ways.

People are always looking for new and better homes or new and better gadgets to put in their new and better homes. People are always looking for new and better gardens to go outside and around their new and better homes.

People at this time of the year are migrating north because they get discontent with the cold weather in Melbourne. People are discontent with their bodies so they spend hours and hours at the gym or spend dollars and dollars on cosmetics.

They're discontent with their homes, their cars, their jobs. That's why the Saturday age is so big. People are discontent in relationships. It's why the divorce rate is so high.

[2 : 3 0] Alcoholism shows that there is discontentment with reality in general. Drug abuse shows the discontent with the thrills and the ecstasy of real life.

And so they try to find it in a fantasy world. The gambling rate shows a discontentment with all sorts of things, really, not just financial affairs. The suicide rate shows a discontentment with life.

Our discontentment is reflected in the fact that we're infatuated by who wants to be a millionaire or various other equivalents. Our discontentment is shown by all the TV series that are makeovers of your wardrobe, your backyard, your face or everything else about your life.

In fact, our discontentment is seen in the fact that we actually live in the age of Oliver. Not Oliver here, but Oliver Twist. Please, sir, can I have some more? The engineer in Miss Saigon sings of the American dream.

What's that I smell in the air? The American dream. Sweet as a new millionaire. The American dream. Come, everyone, come and share.

[3 : 48] The American dream. Name what you want and it's there. The American dream. Spend and have money to spare. That's the American dream.

Live like you haven't a care. That's the American dream. What other place can compare? Come and get more than your share. The American dream.

But it's not just America. It's the Western dream. It's the world's dream. Now is the winter of our discontent. A discontentment that fuels envy and greed and anger.

Sometimes religion is used as a sort of opium to escape from our discontent. Find Jesus and be wealthy. Find Jesus and have all your problems solved. Find Jesus and live a prosperous, easy, comfortable, happy life.

And sometimes you look at the religious gurus and the tele-evangelists and some pastors and the lives of opulence that they live and, well, it's a bit seductive sometimes.

[4 : 53] All false teaching is a partner of some sin or other. We've seen that over the last five weeks in Paul's letter to Timothy.

The false teaching that is endemic, it seems, in Ephesus, to which Timothy has been sent as Paul's apostolic delegate, is driven by various aspects of immorality.

It was the same in Ephesus then as it is wherever you find false teaching that is opposed to the Christian gospel. And it's against such trends and such pressures and such false teaching and against such immorality that Timothy has to stand firm and to be a minister.

Paul says to him in verse 3 or at the end of verse 2, teach and urge these duties. Whoever teaches otherwise and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that is in accordance with godliness is, and then come a list of things we'll look at in a minute.

Those who teach otherwise, the same expressions used at the very beginning of this letter in chapter 1 verse 3. That is, they're heterodox teachers. They're heteros is the other. They're teaching other things than what is the truth.

[6 : 11] And they don't agree with the truth, verse 3 says. It's not just somebody who's teaching by mistake. That is, they're not learned enough to get it right, although there is a great ignorance in these teachers.

But it's a willful rejection of what is right that is conveyed by those words. And what is right, the end of verse 3 says. That is, the sound words of the Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that is in accordance with godliness.

It's in accord with godliness, but with the sense of it leads to or has the goal of godliness. That's what the gospel's about. God's gospel's goal, remember, is godliness.

And so true teaching is teaching that leads to godliness. Godliness. When the gospel is taught, it leads people to godliness in their life.

Godly character. And only God's gospel actually leads to godliness. All other teaching, in the end, leads to godlessness. And that's why it's so important that the wrong teaching is opposed by Timothy and opposed by this letter written by Paul.

[7 : 20] The false teachers, those who are teaching other than what leads to godliness, are described from verse 4 onwards. They are conceited. That is, swollen-headed or puffed up, full of hot air, we might say.

They're understanding nothing. That is, they're an ignoramus. They don't actually understand the truth. They haven't grasped it. They can't teach it. Same idea comes back in chapter 1 again, in chapter 1, verse 7.

Some translations say they are conceited idiots. Another translation, they are pompous ignoramuses. Well, strong language, but Paul uses strong language here.

More than that, they have a morbid craving for controversy. A sick craving. That is, it's showing their sign of a lack of health.

The words of Jesus are, in verse 3, sound words. That is, healthy words. But these people have a sick craving. A morbid fascination with things that lead to or are part of controversy and disputes about words.

[8 : 33] That is, they're preoccupied with trivial, unhealthy things. Unhealthy in that they are not leading to godliness in their lives or in the lives of those whom they teach.

That is, their whole nature is disputatious. They're divisive in their character. They're not unifying people in truth or love as the gospel does. And from these come all sorts of sins.

As verse 4 goes on to say, envy, dissension, slander, base suspicions, that is, evil suspicions, and wrangling among those who are depraved in mind and bereft of the truth.

The list of sins there is very similar to the list you get at the end of Romans 1, where Paul describes pagans. That is, here are people who are professing to be Christians, but are teaching other than the gospel, and actually what is being promoted is not godliness, but pagan character.

Envy, suspicion, division between people, thinking the worst of others, speaking badly about them behind their backs, bringing down people's reputation, having your own brought down by other people.

[9 : 52] That's not godliness, but that's what false teaching, in the end, does. And they're wrangling among those who are depraved in mind.

You see, the sort of sequence is that in the pursuit of heresy, it leads to the pursuit of immorality, the envy, the suspicion, that godless characters come to the fore.

And from the pursuit of immorality, what happens is that we're not unaffected by it. If we pursue heresy and therefore end up pursuing immorality and promoting envy, suspicions, and all those sorts of immorality, our whole mind is clouded.

We lose our moral compass. And so verse 5 goes on to say, Depraved in mind, unable now to see what is right and true and godly.

As we've gone off track, we've lost our bearings. I remember years ago, the day I moved to England to live, 15 years ago whenever, I went wandering off into the town to try and set up a bank account and do all those sorts of things.

[11 : 00] It's a nice town. It's got lots of curvy streets. And I ended up going completely the opposite direction, trying to find my way back to where I was boarding. Absolutely the opposite direction.

That's what happens when we veer off course down godless paths. As we end up in the midst of envy and suspicion and slander and malice and so on, we're actually heading the completely opposite direction from a godly direction to God.

And so we've lost our moral compass. As verse 5 says, Depraved in mind and bereft of truth. It's as though truth has been taken from us and robbed from us.

We're completely devoid of anything to do with the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's how perverse it is in the end. Imagining that godliness is a means of gain.

People who think that somehow the whole point of godliness is not to be like Christ, but rather is somehow to make money out of it, to make some fame or success or fortune in some way.

- [12 : 05] It's thoroughly self-serving. That's the picture of these false teachers here. They are greedy for gain. That's what they're in it for. They're in it for the money, the prestige, the fame, the status, the kudos and so on.

Now, of course, religion can be used for greedy gain. Think of the Rajneesh and his fleet of limousines a few years ago. Think of the wealth of some pastors, famous pastors or tele-evangelists that you see from time to time.

And as a minister, it's not hard, actually, to manipulate people under your care on the site to pay you more, that sort of thing. It's not unknown at all, let me tell you.

And in Paul's day, of course, religious speakers or philosophers, they were paid to speak. They're out there to get money. That's what they're in it for. And so that seems to be the culture that's been carried over here by these false teachers.

Now, Paul's response to this in verse 6 is an astonishing statement. Of course, there is great gain in godliness. And all of a sudden, you think Paul's agreeing with these heretics.

- [13 : 12] He's agreeing that somehow godliness is going to be gainful for us. But then, of course, the sting comes in the tale at the end of verse 6, combined with contentment. There is great gain in godliness combined with contentment.

Paul actually turns it completely on its head. He's not talking about the gain they are seeking. He's talking about a completely other gain from godliness combined with contentment.

It's not the sort of gain that these false teachers and their followers were craving. Godliness plus contentment is great gain.

It is a god-sufficiency in contrast to what we might call a self-sufficiency. A god-sufficiency, that's contentment.

And with godliness, that is great gain. Paul himself knew this. And he wrote about it when he wrote to the church in Philippi.

- [14 : 17] In words that are very striking, but I think come to the heart of what it is to express a godly contentment. He writes in the last chapter of the letter to the Philippians these words.

I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances, I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need.

I can do all things through him who strengthens me. And then he goes on a few verses later to say, Godly contentment.

I wonder if you've discovered godly contentment. Could you write as Paul did, whether in times of plenty or in times of few, that you are content?

Content in God. Paul's not advocating poverty by contrast to wealth, not at all. He's advocating contentment with God's sufficiency.

- [15 : 46] That's what it's all about. That's what he himself had come to learn and to be fully satisfied, fully content with God's sufficiency in times of plenty and in times of not plenty.

He goes on to give some grounding for this comment in verse 6. In verses 7 and 8, he writes, That's sufficient, he says.

Food and clothing, the basic necessities of life which God will provide, God promises to provide, a God's sufficiency that leads to a God contentment. Have you got that God contentment?

Is godliness plus contentment the mark of your life? Is contentment in Jesus, as Paul expressed it when he wrote to the Philippians, can you resonate with that?

Is that your experience? Is that your joy? Do you agree with the song we sometimes sing that only you can satisfy? You see, I don't often see godly contentment in modern Christian life.

[17 : 10] We see it in all sorts of areas where Christians actually demonstrate a discontentment. When they are looking for a switching jobs, maybe working longer hours but motivated by more pay, compromising their ability to be in church or participate in Christian life.

The pursuit of non-Christian relationships. A deep dissatisfaction sometimes even in church life or in church experience. Wanting somehow to get a deeper or higher somehow spiritual experience.

Dissatisfied with what God has delivered thus far. Sometimes you see that discontentment with a deep disillusionment when Christians let us down.

But Christians often let us down. We often let others down. See, being godly and contented is not easy. Every billboard we pass in the street, every advert on TV or in the radio, bombards us to be discontent with everything in life.

Our world just serves beer, but beer never quite slakes the thirst. The more we drink, the thirstier we become. Gold is like that, although we don't drink it.

[18 : 27] The more you have, the more you want. What Paul is hinting at here is that only Jesus truly satisfies.

Only the gospel of God truly, deeply, lastingly, enduringly satisfies our hearts.

Only Jesus. Only Jesus. Who said, come to me if you're thirsty. Come to me if you're weary or heavy laden. Come to me if you hunger. And I will satisfy you, he says.

For eternity. At the deepest level of our life. Only Jesus satisfies. And only in godly contentment will we find that great satisfaction.

The choice is actually very stark here. Between the gospel and between other teaching. They end up diametrically opposed to each other. Godliness or godlessness.

[19 : 31] With God or far away from God. That's why this letter is so serious. That's why Paul takes these issues so seriously when people teach other than the gospel of Jesus Christ.

You see, the choice is do you want to be godly or do you want to be rich? It's a Jesus or Eddie choice. Do you want to be a follower of Jesus or do you want to be a millionaire?

Jesus or Eddie, they're the choices we've got. Paul says in verse 9. Those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.

It's a pretty desperate way of describing the plight of those who pursue wealth and riches and gain. If you want to be rich, then your desire will mean that you will fall for the temptations that come.

And as you fall for the temptations, you're snared and trapped by them. They're not something that you master. They master you. And as you fall into the temptations because of your pursuit of wealth, it will lead to all sorts of other desires that are evil.

[20 : 44] All sorts of other sins that will spring. And ultimately, the destination of that path is ruined. That's what Paul's saying here in verse 9. Those who want to be rich, they fall into temptation.

They're trapped then. And they're trapped by many senseless and harmless desires, other desires that are evil. And they plunge or drown people in ruin and destruction.

The temptation in that verse is the same sort of idea, the snare of temptation that Paul has already referred to back, say, in chapter 3. When he talked about those who should be overseers of God's people must not fall into the snare of the devil.

And the other desires, think of our greed for wealth and what it spawns. Murder, hatred, lies, gossip, slander, injustice, fraud.

The list goes on and on and on. Our greed for gain is thoroughly productive of all sorts of other sins. The summary then in verse 10.

[21 : 48] The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. And in their eagerness to be rich, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

The Bible's got graphic examples of that. There are others. Eve, Achan in Joshua. Judas, of course. Ananias in the early chapters of Acts.

There are others. The love of money. Or the love of Jesus. There are two options, basically.

The love of money will produce all sorts of other sins. All other kinds of evil. And the destination is ruin and destruction.

You cannot serve both God and mammon. What does it profit a person to gain the whole world and yet forfeit their soul? In such contrast to that is to be Timothy.

[22 : 55] Man of God, he's called. Title used for Moses, Elijah, for David, Elisha and other great heroes of the Old Testament. And three things are charged to him by way of contrast to the false teachers in Ephesus.

As for you, man of God, firstly, shun all this. Flee from it. That is, he's commanded to flight. To run away from it.

Don't have anything to do with it. Don't flirt with it. Flee from it. And instead, pursue righteousness. Because Paul's sort of graphic picture is, all of these things are down there.

Righteousness is in that direction. The opposite direction. Flee from that and that will mean pursuing that. Head in that direction. But not just casually wandering. Shun it is flee.

And pursue it has got an intensity about it. Pursue. And then the list of things. Six virtues. Righteousness. Godliness. Faith. Love.

[23 : 52] Endurance. Gentleness. Key characteristics of what godliness is all about. Pursue them. And flight is that first command. The second is fight.

Verse 12. Fight. The good fight of the faith. That is, sometimes we think we've embraced the Christian faith and it's as though we can sort of snuggle up with it in a dozy way on a couch.

But we've actually got to fight for it. To hold fast to it. To cling to it. To contend for it. To resist the heresy. To speak out against what is falsely taught.

For the sake of others as well as for ourselves. And then thirdly, the third command in this little sequence, in the middle of verse 12, is take hold of the eternal life. Not that eternal life is something that just sort of we drift into one day.

But to take hold of it now. And to hold fast to it now. That's our destination. Grip it. As we grip the gospel. And the seriousness of this for Timothy.

[24 : 53] Don't underestimate. Paul goes on, you see, to say in verse 13. In the presence of God, who gives life to all things and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep the commandment.

Get a sense of the seriousness of this? Paul is summoning every bit of authority here. In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, I charge you, Timothy, to keep the commandment.

This is not an optional extra. This is not just sort of, let me give you a little bit of advice. Or let me encourage you in this direction. No, no, no. We're talking about life and death matters here. So Paul summons the judge of the living and the dead.

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, I charge you, Timothy, keep the commandment. Which commandment? Well, the commandments in general.

The commandments to preach and teach and live the truth of the gospel. To be a godly person. Which is what, in essence, this whole letter is all about. Paul is, in a sense, bringing into the equation.

[26 : 10] The presence of the holy and awesome God. The judge. He's envisioning, in a sense, Timothy coming to stand before the judgment throne of God.

How will he stand? How will he give account on that final day? There, in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, what will wealth buy? Those who pursue wealth.

Those who love money. Paul's already said, back in verse 7, We brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out of it. So he's envisioning at the end of our life.

Standing before God. What are we going to do? Empty our pockets of all our bank notes and share portfolios. We take nothing out with us. People sometimes say, what did so and so leave in their will?

The answer always is, everything. They don't take anything. You see, the pursuit of wealth, Paul is saying, is folly.

[27 : 10] You can't take it with you. It doesn't do you any good before the judgment throne of God. Kerry Packer would have stood penniless before God's judgment throne at his death.

And even in this life, of course, wealth is uncertain. Wealth is uncertain because of wars and share markets and interest rates and company takeovers and inflation and divorce and all sorts of things.

Wealth itself is not really a goal that's substantial. No, by itself, it's not necessarily evil. Paul's not saying pursue poverty. But he's saying the pursuit of wealth is fatal.

He's attacking in this chapter the desire, the greed, and the love of money. Notice that he doesn't command the wealthy to give all their wealth away like Jesus did to that man.

But he does command them not to rely on it. So he goes on in verse 17 to say, As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches.

[28 : 21] That is, not to be boastful about their wealth, not to flaunt their wealth. You always tell a person who's boastful about their wealth because they say, I'll just go and get, not the car, I'll just go and get the Jag or the Merc or something like that.

Not to set your hopes on wealth. Not to rely upon it for your future, even your earthly future. And certainly not for your eternity. If you want to get a picture of those who rely upon wealth, but the sadness that it is.

One of the great novels, I think, one of my favorite novels, is Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. It's only a short novel. You can read it tonight, I'm sure, before you go to sleep. It's the most beautifully written novel.

But it's so poignant for somebody who pursues wealth, who's got it all. *Gatsby* is rich. He's got this fabulous mansion in New York. And he's trying to impress Daisy. And he shows around his house and all these shirts that he's never worn, but they're beautiful.

And all these books that are actually real, not fake. But it's so empty. It does him no good in the end. Scott Fitzgerald wrote about wealth in other places as well.

- [29 : 33] He's got a little short story called The Diamond As Big As A Ritz. It's a sort of fantasy of wealth. Of this man who is so wealthy that he's set up magnetic fields so that he's out of America.
- The Americans don't even know he exists. And he's got diamonds as big as the Ritz Hotel. And in the end, of course, it comes to nothing.
- And the little short story finishes with him standing on top of a hill silhouetted as he shakes his fist at God for taking it away. Don't be like that.
- That's what Paul is urging Timothy to command those who are rich not to be boastful about their wealth, not to rely upon their wealth because it's stupid as well as fatal.
- Rather, it's the wealth of godliness plus contentment that brings the gain of heaven. Verse 17 goes on in contrast.
- [30 : 34] Rather, rely on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Everything we need.
- A God sufficiency. They are to do good, to be rich in good works. That is, those who are rich perhaps with money, they're to be rich in good works.
- That's what matters. That's godliness and contentment. They are to be generous and ready to share. And how often the wealthy are not.
- Behind Paul's words here, I'm sure, are Jesus' words at the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6 about where you place your treasure and what you rely upon.
- You see, verse 19, he goes on to say, thus storing up for themselves treasure. He doesn't say treasure in heaven as Jesus does in Matthew, but the treasure of a good foundation for the future.
- [31 : 36] That is, a heavenly treasure. That's the real treasure. That's godliness plus contentment. That's the great gain. Not earthly wealth. That's nothing. So that they may take hold of the life that really is life.
- You see, life on earth, pursuit of money and possessions, that's not real life. It'll come to nothing and you'll stand naked and empty before the judgment throne of God.
- In the presence of that God and the judge, the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul says, pursue godliness with contentment. That's the great gain. Because only with godly contentment on that final day will we stand before the judge of the living and the dead and grasp the full reality of eternal life.
- That is our gain. Discontentment is a dangerous breeding ground. Unequivocally, it leads to eternal ruin.
- It may begin in mild ways. The sort of innocent, please sir, can I have some more? But invariably and unchecked, discontentment develops into heresy, immorality, evil, snare and ruin.
- [32 : 52] And on the day of the Lord Jesus Christ, clothed in earthly riches, not, it'll be naked, you'll be bereft of the truth. It's not a good place to be. Timothy, as the teacher of this congregation, is to shun discontentment and heresy, pursue godliness, fight for the faith and take hold of eternal life.
- And though he uniquely was the leader of this church or the apostolic delegate to this church, those instructions to Timothy nonetheless apply to all those who would follow the Lord Jesus Christ, whether we're leaders of congregations or not.
- shun the pursuit of earthly wealth and the heresy and immorality that accompanies it. Pursue godliness and gentleness and love and faith and endurance.
- Fight for the faith. Take hold of eternal life. That means that we're to guard our attitudes to riches and wealth. Our world keeps wanting to feed our discontentment.

We're to guard against that. Not to boast in our wealth, not to rely upon our wealth, not to be obsessed by our wealth, to accept its uncertainties, and certainly to be generous and share, probably much more than any of us actually do.

[34 : 10] We're to cultivate godly contentment. We're to cultivate satisfaction in the Lord Jesus Christ, that he has given us all that we need for eternity. Nothing more is needed other than what he gives us.

That's real satisfaction. We're to take our hunger, our thirst, our discontentment to him and find real deep, lasting contentment in the Lord Jesus Christ. We're to look ahead to the final day and realize that all of what we have on earth counts for nothing on that day.

We're to store up treasure in heaven, treasure as a good foundation for the future, as Paul calls it here. And when you think of it, how unlike earth heaven will be.

Heaven is a heavenly banquet greater than Jamie Oliver could ever cook. Heaven are the clothes of white linen, of righteousness, far better and more important and more lasting than the transient fashions and fads of this world that so consume us.

The heavenly garden will be more beautiful than Burke's and the mansion of the new Jerusalem will never need a makeover or changing. Heaven, you see, has no room for improvement.

[35 : 23] And heaven is ours. That's our gain. If we have godly contentment in the Lord Jesus Christ and his gospel. Godliness plus contentment is great gain.

And the goal of the gospel is godliness. Grace be with you.