

Consent to Wholesome Words

*Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me,
in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. II Timothy 1:13*

Paul begins this chapter with a word to slaves in general. Christianity arose in a social setting where slavery was commonplace. There were some 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire and many received the gospel and became part of the church. It was not uncommon for a master and slave to go to church together, where the slave would be an elder in the church and the master was expected to submit to the slave's spiritual leadership. Thus Paul needed to give Timothy instructions on what to teach.

READ I Timothy 6: 1-2

Paul called on slaves to count their masters worthy of all honor - that is:

- to respect, comply, obey, and do what the employer says and requires
- to do a job and do it well
- to be thankful and appreciative for having work to do

If the Christian workman does not give a full day's work for a full day's wage, he dishonors the name of Christ. If the workman is lazy, slothful, or disrespectful then the employer sees that God makes no difference in that person's life. These same principles apply to our occupations today. It is important for us as Christians to be above reproach in our work. When we work hard and honor our employers, it glorifies God. When we do a bad job, it brings shame to the name of Jesus. People tend to judge Christianity based on what they see in how we live our lives.

Colossians 3:22-24 tells us, "*Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.*" Looking for recognition from those we serve often finds us feeling slighted, overlooked, or even angry. However, when we do our work as unto the Lord we can find contentment knowing we did our best for Him.

It can be great when we work for a Christian and have that bond in common, expecting to be treated justly and fairly. However, the workman needs to watch out that he doesn't feel he should be:

- given special treatment
- allowed to slack off some
- treated with more leniency
- given more consideration
- not be as readily corrected for inefficiency or mistakes

The Christian workman is to give great service to the Christian employer because faithfulness bears fruit. When both the workman and employer do the best they can, they will bear more fruit of the Spirit and a greater production of work, which gives a better testimony for Christ.

READ I Timothy 6:3-5

Paul again reminds Timothy to be on guard against those who would misuse the word of God. *“Teaches otherwise”* can be replacing the plain teaching of God’s word with a focus on visions or strange experiences, something more than just His word. We see that still done today: gold dust or feathers floating down from the ceiling, uncontrolled laughter, etc... There are prideful teachers who play around with God’s word rather than treating it like the precious gift it is: they deny, ignore, explain away, or twist God’s word to mean something else.

Envy, strife, reviling, and evil suspicions are the fruit of the disputes and arguments that occur when God’s word is misused. Their presence in a church body causes division and does damage. Therefore, Paul warned Timothy, *“From such withdraw yourself.”* Timothy needed to be aware that these people might:

- Envy him and his office without admitting it (age)
- Create strife among the Christians
- Promote reviling of Timothy and other leaders in the church
- Be the source of evil suspicions - always suspecting Timothy and the other leaders of evil motives and plots

Timothy needed these warnings because some dangerous people are not as obvious as we would expect - they blend right in with the sheep.

“Who suppose that godliness is a means of gain” - another characteristic of those who misuse God’s word. Their interest in the things of God is not entirely for God’s glory but motivated in part by desire for wealth and comfort. I’m sure we could name quite a few pastors who have used the church to become wealthy and live extravagant lifestyles. Then they falsely teach their congregations, *“You know if you want to be rich, if you want a Cadillac, just receive the Lord and have enough faith and you can get whatever you want. God wants you to have the best. You deserve to live like the King’s kid.”* Godliness is a way to gain. And when it doesn’t happen or trouble comes, we know the spiritual damage that happens. Many turn their back on God altogether. *From such withdraw yourself! Don’t have anything to do with them!*

READ I Timothy 6:6-10

Rather than considering amassing wealth as a great gain, Paul states that *“godliness with contentment is great gain.”* As followers of Christ, we should focus our efforts on pursuing holiness in conduct, attitude, and thought. We should be content in whatever circumstances God gives to us, just as Paul had done while in prison. *“Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.”* (Philippians 4:11-12)

“Contentment” means to be completely sufficient, to need absolutely nothing. It means to be fulfilled, satisfied, and complete. Contentment never comes from the possession of external things: the secret to contentment is not money. The rich would be shocked by that idea but God gives us reasons why this is true.

1. Money tempts and enslaves. The more you have the more you want. We are bombarded daily by our consumer culture telling us what we just can’t live without, plus we almost always desire more than we need.

2. Money can cause many foolish and harmful desires. Let’s think about clothing. Yes, we do need clothing. But how much do we actually need? Most of us have closets full of clothes that we seldom wear or possibly have never worn that still have the price tags attached, waiting for the day it will be the right size. How foolish is extravagance in clothes? An expensive store and an inexpensive store will carry the very same clothing made by the same manufacturer. Is it wise or foolish to buy the expensive clothing because of that small label with a designer’s name on it?

3. Money plunges men into ruin and destruction when they allow it to become the main focus of their life. God warns us that we cannot serve two masters - we can’t love money and Him.

4. The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil:

- it causes people to covet, and covetousness is idolatry
- it causes people to wander away from the faith and go after the lusts of this world
- it cannot satisfy or fulfill a person’s heart or life; it leaves a void which causes emptiness, worry, anxiety, and insecurity

Contentment, in a biblical sense, is the recognition that we come into the world with nothing and that everything we have is a gift from God’s hands. We can only find contentment when our hearts are rooted in eternal things rather than earthly possessions. Godliness really can bring unbelievable contentment, but first we have to be “*transformed by the renewing of your mind*” (Romans 12:2) - to start putting material things in their proper priority next to spiritual things. It is impossible to be content when our hearts are set on gaining more. We will not remain godly for long if we are not content with what God has given us.

We came into this world with nothing and we can carry nothing out. The things that make a man rich in this world mean nothing in the world to come. But we can send ahead eternal blessing and reward through wise use of what the Lord gives us now. Matthew 6:19-21 reminds us, *Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

Greed causes people to do all sorts of things they wouldn’t normally do. If you watch any TV courtroom dramas you’ll find the crime under consideration is usually motivated by jealousy or greed, or both. The love of money is what motivates people to lie, steal, cheat, gamble, embezzle, and even murder. This greed extends from the poor all the way to the rich man who wants more and more. People who have a love for money lack the godliness and contentment that is true gain in God’s eyes.

Being poor doesn't mean you are godly just as being rich doesn't automatically make you ungodly. There were many unbelievably rich and godly men in the Bible like Abraham, David, and Solomon. But the godly rich had a heart like the psalmist in Psalm 62:10, "*If riches increase, Do not set your heart on them.*" The desire to be rich can really only be satisfied in Jesus Christ and satisfied with spiritual riches rather than material ones. Everything else falls short.

In closing, a quote from William Barclay makes an excellent point:

Money in itself is neither good nor bad; it is simply dangerous on that the love of it may become bad. With money, a man can do much good; and with money he can do much evil. With money a man can selfishly serve his own desires; and with money he can generously answer the cry of his neighbor's need. With money a man can buy his way to the forbidden things and facilitate the path of wrong-doing; and with money he can make it easier for someone else to live as God meant him to live. Money is not an evil, but it is a great responsibility."

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."

Hebrews 13:5