

1 Timothy 6:1-10

The [video you just watched](#) was of Aimee Semple McPherson who started what might be considered the nation's first megachurch in Los Angeles. In 1923 she built the Angelus Temple that grew to a weekly attendance of 16,000. She was just as popular and well known as Charles Lindbergh and Babe Ruth. Time magazine named her one of three most influential people of the 20th century. Kathie Lee Gifford has written a musical about her and described Aimee saying, "Oprah, Lady Gaga and Madonna put together were not what Aimee was then."

But her ministry and her life were also riddled with controversy. She was married and divorced three times. She allegedly faked her own death so she could run away with another man. The famous writer, Upton Sinclair, wrote a poem about her tragic death. Two people died looking for her body in the ocean. She died in 1944 of what was probably an accidental overdose of prescription drugs.¹

She was one of an endless parade of preachers and evangelists who fit the description that Paul wrote to Timothy, people who think *that godliness is a means of gain*. They were active in the first century and sadly they seem to be more popular than ever. Let's read about them from the pen of the apostle Paul.

Let all who are under a yoke as bondservants regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled. 2 Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brothers; rather they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their good service are believers and beloved.

Teach and urge these things. 3 If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, 4 he is 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, 5 and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. 6 But godliness with contentment is great gain, 7 for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. 8 But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. 9 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. 10 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.

This passage is about Christian charlatans—those who believe and live as if godliness is a means of financial gain. But it’s also about those who have a love for money. But if you think that these don’t apply to you, this passage is also about contentment. If you ever struggle with contentment—and who doesn’t—then this passage is for you.

But let’s start with the issue plaguing Timothy, the pastor of the church in Ephesus. Paul described them as *people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth imagining that godliness is a means of gain*. In verse three he said that they were teaching a different doctrine. As if it wasn’t bad enough that the false teachers were leading people astray, but they were also fleecing the unsuspecting, gullible sheep in the process.

This leads us to our first principle: Bad doctrine always leads to bad consequences. If your teaching is flawed you cannot help but to go down the wrong path.

If you recall, this is the very purpose for which Paul wrote to Timothy. After the greeting, Paul’s opening sentence was, *As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine* (1 Tim. 1:3). We could ask which came first—the love for money which molded their false doctrine or the false doctrine which led to a love for money but like the chicken and the egg, it really does not matter because they always go together. False doctrine and a love for money are like a symbiotic monster—one cannot live independent of the other. Bad doctrine and the love of money feed off of one another and each causes the other to grow stronger.

Which is why Paul warned Timothy to *Watch your life and doctrine closely* (1 Tim. 4:16—NIV). This is also why the list of qualifications for elders includes the standard that they are, “not greedy for money.”

But if the pursuit of financial gain is wrong, one would think that Paul would want his readers to pursue the opposite of a love for money; perhaps a hatred for money or a lack of desire to gain

anything at all, as if the pursuit itself was wrong. But what Paul said next was not a reduction of desire or gain but the pursuit of true wealth. *But godliness with contentment is great gain.* The false teachers wanted financial gain but there is something far greater than money at stake here. In other words, there is great gain to be had. You ought to pursue godliness, not for financial gain, but for other benefits which are **great**. We are to be motivated by the potential for gain. John Piper said it this way. “It is very profitable not to pursue wealth.”² And this corresponds with what we studied in chapter four: *for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.* (1 Tim. 4:8) do you see—the opposite of a love and desire for money is not a sour-pussed, ‘woe is me’ pursuit of martyrdom and misery at all cost. The opposite of a love for money is a passionate desire for true gain. God never wants to remove our passion and pursuit of things he just wants to change our passion and direction.

The key to this incredible gain is contentment. Godliness with contentment is great gain. The word that Paul used for contentment is an interesting word. Listen to the definition.

The word is both a central concept in ethical discussion from the time of Socrates and yet also a well-worn term in ordinary usage. In Cynic and Stoic philosophy it denotes one who exercises → ἀρκεῖσθαι in relation to his own inner possibility and who thus becomes an independent man sufficient to himself and in need of none else.³

In secular Greek culture, contentment was a self-sufficiency and steely independence. To be content was not to need anything from anyone else because you were sufficient unto yourself. And many Christians believe that this is how the Christian life works. They are stuck in the thinking that “God helps those who help themselves.” This is almost the same thing as an independent spirit which seeks contentment within himself or herself.

A poll by George Barna revealed that the phrase, “God helps those who help themselves,” is the most well known verse in the Bible as well as its central message.⁴ We know this saying primarily through Benjamin Franklin’s, *Poor Richard’s Almanac*, but the gospel message does not declare that “God helps those who help themselves.” Even if you don’t think it’s in the Bible, many of you live your lives by this principle.

But the origin of this thinking and this saying goes back much further than Ben Franklin. It originated in Greek mythology from the 6th century BC in a story called Hercules and the Waggoner (6th century BC). In the story, a waggoner’s heavy load becomes bogged down in mud. In despair, the waggoner cries out to Hercules for help. Hercules replies, “Get up and put your shoulder to the wheel. The gods help them that help themselves.”⁵

Not only is this not in the Bible, but it has origins in pagan mythology that are in direct contradiction to the Bible and God’s character. God does not help those who help themselves, but just the opposite. God helps those who cannot help themselves. One commentator described it like this. “The self-sufficiency of the Christian is relative: an independence of the world through dependence upon God.”⁶

And another wrote, “The contentment that is of great profit is one that seeks its security not in worldly riches but in God.”⁷ This brings in our second principle: Contentment is not being satisfied in your circumstances but in the God who gave you your circumstances.

Do you realize that every complaint we utter to one another or whisper under our breath is a slap in the face to God? Each complaint is a direct attack on either God’s goodness or his sovereignty. Our complaints attack God’s goodness because we don’t believe that he acted in a loving manner by giving us our present circumstances. Even if attacking God’s goodness never enters our thought process, this is what we are doing. It can also be an attack on God’s sovereignty because we might believe that God is a loving God, but he doesn’t have the ability to give us better circumstances. He wants to help, but he can’t. He’s not able, so we complain, moan, gripe and whine.

Isn’t this what the Israelites did in the wilderness for forty years? Isn’t this why there were even IN the wilderness for forty years and why most of them died in the wilderness over those forty years? They were complainers and whiners. They doubted God’s goodness and his sovereignty. They doubted the essential character of God. As so each of our complaints ultimately casts doubt upon the character of God.

That’s the negative view but positively, contentment in God is illustrated powerfully by verse seven: *for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.* This



is so good that it has to serve as our third principle. This is also known as the No U-haul behind hearse principle. This is an old photo so I doubt it is photoshopped. You can’t take it with you, so why do we as if we can. *We brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.* This verse is filled with rich, abiding wisdom. Its logic is undeniable. No one has ever

contradicted this statement. It should be inscribed on the front of every car dealership and department store. When you log into your bank or investment website, this should be the first thing you see. Ebay and Amazon every other website where you shop should have this as their web banner. Your credit cards, wallet and checkbook should have this prominently displayed. *We brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.* This is proverbial, Biblical wisdom that if heeded would be the death to all materialism and lack of contentment.

And it explains Paul’s next statement. *But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.* We will? Will you be content with just food and clothing? What about shelter? What about a car to get to work? What about...what about... Our minds reel with this one because food and clothing, though necessary, do not seem sufficient. Does this mean that Dave Ramsey is wrong about all of his financial advice? Is it wrong to save for retirement and college? If we have 401k’s and IRA’s does this mean that we are not trusting the Lord?

At the risk of sounding like I am correcting Paul or softening his edge, I do not think that Paul expected us to live in caves and return become hunters and gatherers again. (Although for all of you on the “cave man”/paleo diet, you would probably like this for the first few weeks or so!) What I believe Paul meant is that when you get right down to it, that is all we really need. If that is what God provided, then it would be sufficient. After all, much of the world struggles to even have these basic necessities. In fact, that has been the case for most of the world for all of human history. People have always scratched out a living to provide for these basic necessities.

Furthermore, Paul could not have required that we seek to be poor because that would contradict what he wrote to the church in Philippi.

Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. 12 I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me (Phil. 4:11-13).

Let me make several points about this passage. First, contentment is something that is learned. Selfishness and discontentment is the place at which we all start. You don’t have to teach a toddler to want things. You don’t have to teach a small child to desire legos and trucks and dolls and frilly things but you do have to teach them not to constantly want these things. You do have to teach them contentment because it does not come naturally to our sinful nature.



A photographer traveled the world to take pictures of children and their toys. Her photos were more of a sociological experiment than a work of art. Her conclusions were very insightful.

But how they play can reveal a lot. The richest children were more possessive. At the beginning, they wouldn’t want me to touch their toys, and I would need more time before they would let me play with them “In poor countries, it was much easier. Even if they only had two or three toys, they didn’t really care. In Africa, the kids would mostly play with their friends outside.

Ultimately, the toys on display reveal the hopes and ambitions of the people who bought them in the first place. “Doing this, I learnt more about the parents than I did about the kids.”⁸

Children learn contentment from us, their parents as we learned, or did not learn, as the case may be, from our parents. But if you haven't learned contentment as an adult, don't go blaming mom and dad for it. The point is that it is learned and even old duffers can still learn this.

The second thing we learn from this passage in Philippians is that contentment is not based on how much stuff you have, whether small or great. *I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.* Paul lived in times of plenty and times of want, although, I would guess that his times of plenty still paled in comparison to our plenty and excess. If Paul had more than he needed, he was content and did not desire yet more and if he has real needs before him—no doubt things like food and clothing—he was content. As our second principle states, contentment is not being satisfied in your circumstances but in the God who gave you your circumstances.

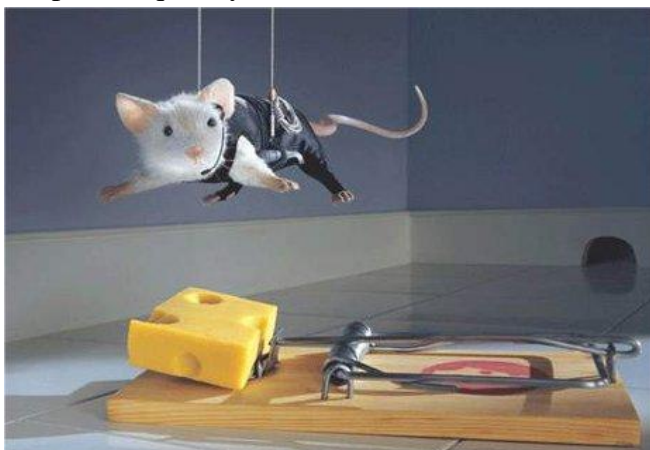
Moreover, there were plenty of rich people in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament.

- Abraham
- Isaac
- Jacob
- Boaz
- Gideon
- David
- The women who supported Jesus' ministry⁹
- Joseph of Arimathea

Therefore, you can learn to be content as a rich person, but it is much more difficult to do so, which is why the most severe warnings come at the end of this section.

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. 10 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.

The desire to be rich has fatal and eternal consequences. First comes the temptation. Sin always starts with a temptation. Each of us is tempted to be discontent and to covet more than we have. Discontentment and coveting are two sides of the same coin. One leads to the other. After temptation comes the snare and many senseless and harmful desires. In other words, A little temptation quickly leads to a snare.



We had some mice in the basement this past week, which seems to have been happening ever since our cat died. Ethan is now our official mouser, which makes sense since he is also our biggest cat lover. He put out some of those sticky traps and baited them with cheese but the next day all we caught was some mouse fur. Somehow they became stuck but were able to escape. Ethan joked that there was probably a hairless

mouse running around in the basement. He found some real mouse traps with the spring loaded snare and within eight hours, two mice were dispatched into oblivion.



This is a good illustration of the danger of riches. The desire to be rich is always a type of snare. Like the hairless mouse, some people can escape from this snare but not without getting hurt but others will never escape but instead are “plunged into ruin and destruction.” The word destruction is a very specific word that always means eternal destruction. The desire to be rich literally causes people to wander from the

faith and some of them never return but are destroyed by their own desires.¹⁰ In other words, the love of money can send you to hell. Obviously, it is not the love of money per se which sends you to hell but rather your lack of belief in Christ as Savior, but the love of riches is a barrier to that belief.

And then we have the well known verse: *For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils.*

This is usually misquoted and becomes simply “money is the root of all evil” but that is completely wrong. Money is neutral just like everything else that God gives us for our good, but money is also *a* root or one of many roots of all kinds of evil. It is not the sum of all evil but a love for money can easily lead to evil. When it comes to investigating all kinds of white collar and blue collar crime, the old adage remains true—follow the money. If you can find out who potentially benefitted in some way from a given crime, you will find your perpetrator. The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil but not the sum of all evil.

But Paul was not trying to downplay the danger of a love of riches. It will tempt you, destroy your contentment, ensnare you and possibly destroy you. And do not miss the fact that he was writing to Timothy, the pastor of the church in Ephesus with this warning. This was not a letter addressed to a group of wealthy Jewish men or the equivalent to the Forbes list of richest people in the world. This was written to a church similar to our church. All of these warnings and exhortations are meant for you and me just as much as they were meant for the Ephesian church.

Let me leave you with a few practical applications.

See God as both good and sovereign. What he has given to you is for your best. Remember that contentment is not being content in your circumstances but in the God who gave you those circumstances.

Practice thankfulness. Gratitude kills discontentment and covetousness. I try to do this in small ways. For example, I have always driven older, high mileage cars because for me, a car is something to get from point A to point B. But that doesn't mean I would not like a nicer car or am always 100% content with my car, so one thing I do is keep it clean, inside and out. I am not obsessive about it by any means but when I take care of it I step back and say to myself, "Ya know, this car is just fine." Good stewardship helps to increase your contentment.

Give your money to the Lord's work. As Randy Alcorn says, "Generosity is to materialism what kryptonite is to Superman." Or John Wesley who said, "I judge all things only by the price they shall gain in eternity."

Rich Maurer
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¹ Today the church is still a megachurch part of the same denomination that McPherson started. Sadly, they have a whole biography page about Aimee on their website but it's all glowing remarks about her and not hint of anything negative.

² <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/money-currency-for-christian-hedonism>

³ . Vol. 1: *Theological dictionary of the New Testament*. 1964- (G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley & G. Friedrich, Ed.) (electronic ed.) (466). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

⁴ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ*. The Doubleday Religious Publishing Group, 2001.

⁵ <http://www.bartleby.com/17/1/61.html>

⁶ Mounce, W. D. (2000). Vol. 46: *Pastoral Epistles*. Word Biblical Commentary (342). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

⁷ Mounce, W. D. , p. 341.

⁸ <http://www.gabrielegalimberti.com/projects/toys-2/>

⁹ *Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, 2 and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, 3 and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.*

¹⁰ See also Proverbs 11:4—Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.