

Text: Hebrews 13:5

Title: Content in God

Truth: Believers should be content—not covetous—because they have God.

Date/Location: Sunday January 29, 2012 at FBC

Introduction

In 13:4 we learned of the need to be faithful in our marriages and to uphold the married state with great respect. Otherwise, we would be objects of God's judgment. Now, we shift gears to something that is somewhat but not totally unrelated: the issue of greed and contentment. We will be thinking in terms of true needs versus wants, and satisfaction versus dissatisfaction.

I. Do Not Be Greedy

“Let your conduct be without covetousness...”

A. What is *covetousness*? The “love of money” is the root word. It has the idea of loving the power and ability to have things that money can provide. It is a strong “want” that directs your energies and passions toward doing something to obtain money or things.

1. Examples of love of money – Pharisees in Luke 16:14, the root of all kinds of evil in 1 Timothy 6:10, and in the last days people will be lovers of money 2 Timothy 3:2. In fulfillment of that prediction, today's society is filled with money love. It may be hard to see at first, but the whole society is shot through with materialism. This has affected each and every one of us hearing this sermon.
2. Pastors should especially be free from the love of money (1 Timothy 3:3). Also the Macedonian believers who gave liberally out of their extreme poverty obviously were not greedy (2 Cor. 8:2).
3. We invent all kinds of innocuous sounding reasons why we “have” to have this or do that. This passage is asking us to carefully consider whether we are actually greedy for more stuff or more money.

B. We are supposed to avoid covetousness. The word in our text is the opposite of covetous, meaning “**not** loving money, **not** greedy.”

1. Our lives, in character and conduct, must be free of greed. The word *conduct* is used to express the manner that something or someone operates. The kind of life that you live and the way you do things must not controlled by money—money should not be your god. This

includes the place you choose to live, to work, and go to church; the car(s) you have, the things you buy and own, etc.

2. If money is your boss, then we know God is not your highest desire. You cannot have God and money as your master (Matthew 6:24).
3. Note that covetousness is one of the sins listed in the 10 commandments in Exodus 20:17. The kinds of things that we can covet include: neighbor's house, wife, male or female servants, animals, or anything else that belongs to him. These things include not only someone else's wife, but his wealth, his social status, his ability to provide for himself as well as his servants, his McMansion, etc.

C. Greed is a Serious Sin

1. If we covet, we are moving toward breaking other commandments. Perhaps we contemplate stealing those things that belong to our neighbor so that we can have those things for ourselves. Or, in the case of another's spouse, covetousness is tantamount to adultery (Matthew 5:28). Or, we regard things and money so highly that they are idols that replace God (violating the first commandment).
2. If you break any one of these laws, you are guilty of breaking the whole Law of God (James 2:10). Have you coveted?
3. The Bible and Christianity teach that all of us have fallen short of the standard of God's law. We are all law-breakers and deserve to be punished for sin.
4. The punishment for sins of all sorts, including these, is death. That includes physical and spiritual death. Physical death is the separation of the spirit from the body. Spiritual death is the separation of the soul from God, the lifegiver.
5. The punishment may seem too stiff—greed of character leads to death? But some other things that God says will help us to see why the punishment is so serious. God associates covetousness with idolatry, and even equates the two.

1 Corinthians 5:10–11 links covetousness and idolatry in the same verse as things that we should not be associated with—along with sexual immorality, drunkenness, and swindlers. It is evidently a serious sin and character flaw which God was not want us to be influenced by.

Ephesians 5:5 says, “For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.” Clearly this equates covetousness with idolatry. Colossians 3:5 does the same thing. The point I draw out of this is that covetousness as we defined earlier is, in effect, replacing the true God with a god of your own. That is idolatry, and rejection of God and rebellion against Him. This is very serious.

It is all too common in our culture, however. Many have rebelled against God and His law and have become idolaters. There should be no surprise that they in fact *will* be greedy. This is a fact of our sinful existence.

D. Are you covetous? You are in need of God’s forgiveness.

II. Be Content

“Be content with such things as you have.”

A. The flip side of covetousness is contentment. The longing for money and things is combatted by the attitude that is satisfied with what one has. It is like the Bible is saying, “Make sure your life is not marked by covetousness, and a prime way that is done is by being content.”

B. *Contentment* is the satisfaction that what you have is adequate. It is a state of being. It is a passive verb form here, which to me conveys the idea that we are not actively generating some façade of contentment, but rather that contentment is a basic part of our character.

Some things and some people are never satisfied. Proverbs 30:15-16 gives examples of things in life that are typically never satisfied.

If we do not have that the satisfaction that what we have is adequate, then we need to repent of that sin and ask God for help.

C. The word “you have” does not focus on personal or private property *per se*, as if we can get a “right of property” from the verse.

1. The idea of it is things that are present or available for use. They are things that are at your disposal, so to speak. So that includes what is in your possession, but may include other things beyond your physical property.
2. It could include your health, station in life (job, marital status, cultural status, etc.), where you live, other benefits you have, etc. God has given you a “lot” in life—both in the sense of a large quantity and a certain portion or allotment in life.

D. The adequacy of your allotment in life is something that you should consider from several perspectives.

1. From the perspective of the brevity of life. You will not have this lot forever. Whatever abundance or shortfall you have is temporary.
2. From the perspective that what you have is what God has given to you. He has deemed it sufficient for the time being. Placing your trust in His always-wise provision helps generate contentment.
3. From the perspective that true contentment does not come from temporal circumstances. Paul learned to be content in whatever state he was (Philippians 4:10-12). The idea is that contentment comes from God.
4. From the perspective of what you truly need versus what you want. What do you *need* to be content? Food and covering (1 Timothy 6:8). We should be content with our wages (Luke 3:14).

Transition: At this point, it would be easy to think that the solution to greed is simply to be content. But there are actually two deeper problems. First, being covetous makes us guilty as sinners before God. Becoming content now does not eliminate our past guilt. How do we get rid of this guilt and the punishment for our sin? Second, from where will we get true contentment? If our spiritual life and outlook does not change, we cannot have a true inner contentment. The next part of verse 5 gives the one solution to this two-fold problem.

III. Why? If You Are a Believer, You Have God and Need Nothing Else!

“Because He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’”

- A. The verse now gives the reason that we should be content—that believers have Jesus Christ and so can be content because they really do not need anything else. He is their Lord, Who will provide everything they need (Matthew 6:30 and surrounding verses).
- B. God’s promise is that “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” It is quoted from Deuteronomy 31:6-8, Joshua 1:5, and 1 Chronicles 28:20. The promise was relevant and powerful when it was given in those contexts. It is repeated here in a way that applies it to all believers in Jesus Christ.

The way the quote is written is powerful in that it offers a strong negation to the idea that God would ever leave His own. It says, literally, “I will *never, ever* abandon you, *nor* will I *ever* forsake you.”

God will never *leave* (abandon or desert). He will never *forsake* (separate or abandon).

To get a sense of the meaning of the word, consider 2 Timothy 4:10 and 16 where Paul was abandoned by his friends.

Then, consider the more fearful time when God did abandon someone.

It was on the cross when Jesus took upon Himself the sins of the world. In a response that indicated God's heavy displeasure against sin, the Father forsook the Son in the sense of separating from Him. God forsook God in a horrific moment of time when sin—yours and mine—was laid upon Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 3:18 says that Christ suffered once for sins, the just One in place of the unjust ones, that He might bring us to God. He paid for our sins and guilt. Matthew 27:46 indicates that part of that payment included being forsaken by God.

What happened on the cross was that God abandoned His Son so that He could receive you into His family and never abandon you. The solution to greed is not simply to be content. Greed, like all other sins, is solved by coming to Jesus Christ, **admitting** your sinfulness and need for cleansing from sin, **believing** that Jesus died for sins and rose victorious over sin and death, and **calling** on Jesus to save you.

- C. If you do have Jesus as Lord and Savior, then you can easily be content. He is the Creator of all things (John 1:1-3), your Redeemer (1 Peter 1:18), your Friend (John 15:14-15). The point is that with Jesus, how could you think about being discontented about the situation God has given you in life? How could you be dissatisfied with temporary and material things if you have the God of the universe as your God? How could you be unhappy when He has given you the greatest of all gifts—Himself and eternal life? There really is no comparison between money and God.
- D. If you do not have Jesus, then you cannot *truly* be content because you do not have what is sufficient in all possible circumstances. You might *feel* content much of the time, but you are still under the sentence of sin and in need of the gospel.
- E. All of this is a great argument against the so-called *prosperity gospel*. That gospel lives in a soil of basic discontent with what one has, in an unsatisfied atmosphere that is always looking for more. It teaches that if you have faith or if you give, then God will give back to you in material things. But God promises *Himself* to us, not His *things*.
 - 1. He owns everything and certainly *can* give any individual or family or church or state or nation anything He desires.

2. But He is interested in a relationship with His people rather than in lavishing them with gifts and letting them live in the lap of luxury. Part of establishing and maintaining that relationship includes the removal of sin from our lives (covetousness, idolatry, adultery, and every other wrong act we do to stray away from God).
3. God already gave the greatest and most indescribable gift of all to humanity, and that is the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

When we run into difficulties, it can be tempting to think of a solution that relies on money or things. What we really need is God! When we have God, temporal solutions seem inadequate by comparison.

Maybe you object, “I have God, but that doesn’t help me get the things I want!” Perhaps God doesn’t *want* you to have the things you want, because that would be bad for you. Here’s the deal on needs and wants. God already knows what you *need* and promises to supply it in accordance with His will. As for what you *want*, that doesn’t matter because what matters is what God *wants*.

God wants you to be content, satisfied with Him and with your station in life. Is having eternal life not enough? Is having the God of the universe not enough? Is having his wise provision of all that you need not enough?

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