

Godliness Plus Contentment = Great Gain

I Timothy 6:3-16, Philippians 4:10-13

Have you given much thought lately to your financial portfolio? I suppose for some of you, you have it well managed and under control. And I'm sure there are others who are saying, I think you have to first have something to manage or control. Well, I thought I understood about financial portfolios until I looked the word up:

There are many types of portfolios including the [market portfolio](#) and the zero-investment portfolio.^[4] A portfolio's asset allocation may be managed utilizing any of the following investment approaches and principles: equal weighting, capitalization-weighting, price-weighting, [risk parity](#), the [capital asset pricing model](#), [arbitrage pricing theory](#), the [Jensen](#) Index, the [Treyner](#) the [Sharpe](#) diagonal (or index) model, the [value at risk](#) model, [modern portfolio theory](#) and others.

Well, I'm sure for our accountants, bankers, and financial planners, that made a lot of sense, but it sounds very confusing to me. But we know for a lot of people in the world, and in particular in our culture, the very measure of one's success has to do with the size of the portfolio...and there is an frantic pursuit to get ahead by accumulating more and more. And we know it's not all about material gain, but about the desire of the heart to go after the treasures of this world.

Running counter to this philosophy of life is the instruction of the apostle Paul to Timothy, his student in the ministry, his son in the faith.

In verses 4 and 5 he talks about the things that often confront us in the world, those things that lead to envy, dissension, slander, suspicions...and then this powerful statement in verse 6 : of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment. Almost like he is giving a mathematical equation...

You have godliness plus contentment = great gain. In otherwords, if we are seeking to move forward in our Christian walk, we have to come to terms with what it means to be content. I suppose we all have a hard time with this subject, we often struggle with it. Maybe it's because our culture thrives in

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making us feel we are discontent. The advertising industry pushes us to feel we will not be happy until we have their product. We are constantly given the impression that what we have is not enough. And in our spirits we start to feel unfulfilled.

Came across an article written by someone who was having these feelings:

I sat down and looked through some magazines this past week. I discovered that if I want to feel right, I need to get a NordicTrack. I don't have a NordicTrack, just a membership down at the gym, so I suddenly realized that I didn't feel as healthy as I thought I did.

I then read that if I wanted to be stylish, I would need to buy a luxury automobile. Our family van was in the shop, so I had been driving our old Mercury Sable. That felt bad enough. Real men drive SUVs or bright red sports cars. I've got four kids, so I don't have the luxury of driving what real men drive. So I found out that I couldn't be stylish with the cars I owned.

Then I saw that if I wanted to really feel the spring season, I had to dress for the spring season, and the only place for that was at Dillard's. I knew I wouldn't have a chance to go to Dillard's that week. Suddenly the beautiful weather just didn't seem that beautiful. I just wasn't dressed for it.

It didn't get any better. I learned that I needed to be opening my mail with knife from Oneida. I only had a two-dollar letter opener from Office Depot. Now even my mail was disappointing. On top of that, I discovered that I couldn't have a good meal if I wasn't in Texas - at least not a meal that would satisfy me. So much for my Lean Cuisines. Then I read that if I wanted to be a man, at least a manlier man than my neighbor, I had to drive a Yard-Man mower with a Briggs and Stratton engine. At least it was cheaper than a new SUV.

I like my house until I saw the new development's ad. I thought my family and I were close until I realized we didn't have season passes to the amusement park. I even thought I loved my wife, but since I hadn't bought her a diamond necklace from the jewelry store, I was informed that I didn't. I found out that I can't even be romantic with my wife unless we use Sylvania light bulbs. Wouldn't you know, we have GE.

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By the time I got finished with those magazines, I wasn't just depressed – I needed counseling.

Those feelings get compounded we add the stress into the mix, and the end result is discontent. And it becomes a vicious cycle...the more we feel unfulfilled, the more we strive to overcome it by the things of the world, and as the pressures mount, the stress level increases, and we spin our wheels seeking for satisfaction that never comes. And doctors end us treating more and more cases of stress related diseases. And we wonder where to turn, how to make sense of it all.

Maybe we feel like the man who said: I came across the book, How to be Happy without Money. He said I would have bought it, but the book was going to cost me 50 bucks.

Obviously, this is not a new problem, but it is a spiritual issue. And so Paul addresses it. Godliness with contentment means great gain. We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.

You've seen the bumper sticker: You never see a hearse pulling a U-haul trailer. You can't take it with you. If our desire is only to gain more things, we can be trapped into this false illusion of happiness.

If you were to ask most Americans what does great gain mean...you would probably get responses like:

How much you have in your bank account, what kind of home you live in, car you drive. Or maybe it would be measured in terms of achievements and personal success. But you know, a person can have all the wealth in the world, but still be spiritually bankrupt.

I guess the apostle Paul knew something about human nature when he wrote these words to Timothy. I picture him as a caring spiritual father and mentor, giving spiritual counsel so that Timothy would have a strong faith. He gives the secret formula: Godliness plus contentment = Great Gain.

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That in order for you and me to experience the kind of spiritual fulfillment and growth that God wants us to experience, we must learn the meaning of contentment

I think first it's very important to realize what contentment is not. Contentment is not complacency. It is not becoming so comfortable in our Christian walk, that we do not move forward and grow. When Paul says he has learned to be content he is not describing a Christian who says I can't do anything about my life, so I'll just have to be resigned to the fact, that whatever happens, happens. We can become comfortable and complacent about our spiritual life and doing so we put ourselves in a dangerous position spiritually. And you become so comfortable with your life, or your surroundings, or where you are spiritually, that you do not see the need to make changes.

It's like the story of frog, put in a pan of warm water. Even though scientists dispute the validity of this experiment, I like the metaphor. It is said that if you put a frog in a pan of warm water and then as the heat is increased only very gradually, he doesn't show any inclination to escape. Since the frog is cold-blooded creature, his body temperature remains approximately the same as the the water around him and he does not notice the slow change taking place. As the temperature continues to intensify, the frog remains oblivious to the danger, he could easily hop to safety, but seems to be thinking of something else. And so he just sits there, comfortably peering over the edge of the pan while the steam curls ominously around his nostrils. Eventually the boiling frog will pass on to his reward, having succumbed to a misfortune, he could have easily avoided.

Learning to be content is not living with an attitude of complacency. I need to realize that there is always more to gain spiritually. Henry Ward Beecher, famous preacher of the 19th century put it like this: There is a sense in which a man looking at the present in the light of the future, and taking his whole being into account, may be contented with his lot. But if a man has come to that point where he is so content that he says, I do not want to know any more, or

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do anymore, or be anymore, he is in a state in which he ought to be changed into a mummy!

When Paul talks about contentment, he's not talking about some static state, rather is a place of spiritual growth. It results in great gain!

It really is coming to that place where I seek all that God wants me to be and all that God wants me to have. It becomes a matter reflecting on where God may be challenging me to grow in my faith. We discover that contentment is not based on external things. It's interesting that Paul doesn't say that having things is the problem, but it's the attitude of our hearts toward them. So that verse often gets misquoted...it's not money that is the root of all evil...it's the love of money...goes back to motives of our hearts. I love Paul's testimony to the Philippian church. "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every circumstances. Contentment is not based on my circumstances, it is based on my trust in the Lord. My belief that God is the source of meeting my needs. This God who will supply all my needs (verse 19) according to his riches in glory. Not the world's riches, but God's riches. Is not how much you have materially, it's how much eternal resources you possess...so that Paul would be able to say with confidence: I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength. That is not complacency, that putting trust in a God who is able to accomplish his purposes in us.

A bishop of the early church, who was a remarkable example of the virtue of contentment, was asked his secret. The venerable old man replied: "It consists in nothing more than making a right use of my eyes. In whatever state I am, I first of all look up to heaven and remember that my principal business here is to get there. Then I look down upon the earth, and call to mind how small a place I shall occupy in it when I die and am buried. I then look around in the world, and observe what multitudes there are who are in many respects more unhappy than myself. Thus I learn where true happiness is placed, where all our cares must end, and what little reason I have to complain."

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I believe that Professional golfer Paul Azinger came to the same conclusion in the journey of his life.

Paul Azinger was diagnosed with cancer at age 33. He had just won a PGA championship and had ten tournament victories to his credit.

He wrote, "A genuine feeling of fear came over me. I could die from cancer. Then another reality hit me even harder. I'm going to die eventually anyway, whether from cancer or something else. It's just a question of when. Everything I had accomplished in golf became meaningless to me. All I wanted to do was live."

Then he remembered something that Larry Moody, who teaches a Bible study on the tour, had said to him. "Zinger, we're not in the land of the living going to the land of the dying. We're in the land of the dying trying to get to the land of the living."

Golfer Paul Azinger recovered from chemotherapy and returned to the PGA tour. He's done pretty well. But that bout with cancer deepened his perspective. He wrote, "I've made a lot of money since I've been on the tour, and I've won a lot of tournaments, but that happiness is always temporary. The only way you will ever have true contentment is in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I'm not saying that nothing ever bothers me and I don't have problems, but I feel like I've found the answer to the six-foot hole."

Today I want you to review your portfolio...how are your investments...I mean the investment of time and energy you are putting into the kind of gain that really matters. My resources I need can never be satisfied with earthly things...they will never make me content. The secret to contentment is found in my walk with the Lord...how I approach the things that God has given me and really has entrusted with me to use with the right spirit. Only then can I truly be content...and my investment will yield great returns in a life richly blessed and fulfilled by the Lord.