

November

22

BE CONTENT

A lifestyle of contentment counteracts an unhealthy desire for more.

THE WORD

EXODUS
20:17

You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

1 TIMOTHY
6:6-10

KEY VERSE

⁶But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. ⁸But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. ⁹Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

1 JOHN
2:15-17

¹⁵Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. ¹⁶For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

ENGAGE THE WORD

Exodus 20:17

MISPLACED DESIRES

The 10th commandment forbids intense desire for anything that rightfully belongs to a fellow Israelite (Deuteronomy 5:21; in the New Testament only in Romans 7:7; 13:9). The command lists seven things not to be coveted, probably intending to cover everything

of another one might crave. As with the commandment prohibiting stealing, this command takes for granted personal property rights.

Unlike Platonism, Stoicism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, neither Judaism nor Christianity considers all desire sinful. The God-given desires for food, water, and clothing, for example, are not sinful. Covetousness is not simple desire, but illicit and insatiable desire—wanting the wrong things far too much. But how much is too much? Does the expression, “I want your life,” indicate a problem with envy or covetousness? Which is worse?

Like the first commandment, the 10th addresses inward attitudes and emotional states and not overt actions (see Matthew 15:19). Covetousness is forbidden because it encourages us to violate other commandments—stealing others’ possessions, committing adultery, lying about it, and murdering to cover up our crimes (see 2 Samuel 11).

THE DESIRE TO GET RICH

1 Timothy 6:6-10

There have always been some who claimed that “godliness is a means of financial gain” (1 Timothy 6:5). In response to the perverse view of the Christian faith as a means to become rich, Paul wrote: “godliness with contentment is great gain” (v. 6). Let’s consider the key terms:

- The word translated “godliness” does not refer to especially “godlike” persons, but particularly religious people who profoundly respect and are devoted to God (see 1 Timothy 2:2; 4:8; 6:11).
- “Contentment” is the satisfaction that comes from realizing we have enough “food and clothing . . . [to] be content” (v. 8). Contentment falls somewhere between subsistence and affluence—not too little, not too much. It is to have enough not to be dependent on the generosity of others. We are “content” when we are satisfied to have our basic needs met.

Did You Know?

John Wesley wrote: If those who gain all they can, and save all they can, will likewise give all they can, then the more they gain, the more they will grow in grace ("Thoughts on Methodism").

- The Greek word translated "gain" in verses 5 and 6 appears only here in the New Testament. It literally refers to the means of making a profit or earning a living. In verse 5, "gain" has the sense of making money. In verse 6, its metaphorical sense is making a good life.

In this passage, Paul offered no indictment of those who are rich and possess lots of money (see James 1:10-11; 2:5-7). His concern was with the dangers facing "those who want to get rich" (1 Timothy 6:9)—poor people "eager for money" (6:10). He did not identify money as "the root of all kinds of evil." Rather, he insisted, "The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil" (6:10). John Wesley reminded his early Methodists that Paul was not referring to those who wanted to get rich by evil means—by theft, robbery, oppression, extortion, fraud, or dishonesty (see his sermons, "The Danger of Riches," "On Riches," and "On the Danger of Increasing Riches").

The deeper problem Paul confronted was covetousness. Those with misplaced desires for wealth "fall into temptation and a trap" (6:9) of diabolical design (see 3:7). The trap consists in the "many foolish and harmful desires," which drive those who love money to pursue even more.

Covetousness—the insatiable craving for more, the inordinate passion for wealth—can "plunge people into ruin and destruction" (6:9). Paul knew former Christians who had chased after "financial gain" (6:5). Their all-consuming desire to "get rich" (6:9) and love for more money and all it could buy, caused them to wander "from the faith" and to pierce "themselves with many griefs" (6:10).

LOVING THE WORLD

1 John 2:15-17

The "world" God loved enough to send His only Son to save from destruction (John 3:16-17) is not "the world" readers of 1 John 2:15 are urged not to love. Scripture sometimes uses "the world" to refer to this

Think About It

Covetousness is an evidence of an unsanctified, if not an unconverted heart. Whether expressed as the love of money or the desire for more money, it is contrary to the pure love of God (John Wesley, “The Danger of Riches”).

earth and all who inhabit it. But more often, as here, “world” refers to the systems rebellious humanity creates and perpetuates, which challenge God’s rightful claim to be the owner of His good creation.

To love this God-defying “world” is to join the rebellion—to want too much what belongs to another. The Greek verb translated “lust” in 2:16 is used in the Septuagint (seh-p-TOU-uh-jihnt: the Greek translation of the Old Testament) to translate “covet” in the 10th commandment (Exodus 20:17). “Love for the Father” and the covetous desire to possess “everything in the world” are incompatible.

We might prefer to assume that “the lust of the flesh” (1 John 2:16) condemns preoccupation with sexual pursuits. We could plead, “Not guilty!” But John Wesley (“The Use of Money”) thought it applied to a more “respectable kind of sensuality”—over-indulgence in food—a waste of money and health.

We might prefer to assume that “the lust of the eyes” (2:16) condemns pornography and plead, “Not guilty!” But Wesley (“The Danger of Riches”) thought it challenged fallen humanity’s insatiable acquisitiveness. We use our excess money to indulge ourselves with frivolous expenditures on new clothes, bigger houses, and useless decorations. God entrusts us with more than enough so we can enjoy the blessing of feeding the hungry and clothing the naked.

John Wesley (“The Use of Money”) believed “the pride of life” (2:16) referred to our vain pursuit of honor, admiration, and praise that comes from conspicuous consumption. We must avoid the desire for people to notice our huge piles of “toys” and instead develop a thankfulness for how God has blessed us.

REFLECT

In light of the message of today’s passages, take time this week to evaluate the way you view and value “things.”