

There were false teachers in the Church in Ephesus. They held to a different understanding of Jesus—and a different understanding of godliness. And their bad theology was all about greed and selfishness. They used their influence for personal gain. They presented God’s blessings as something financial. And Paul warns Timothy—and us—about them.

Paul even names names in 2 Timothy 2. I mentioned these two false teachers earlier in our sermon series. He says, “But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus.” Such teachers and their teachings were harmful to the Church.

The Reformers define the Church as a place where the Gospel is rightly taught. And here, they use the term *Gospel* broadly. It includes all that Jesus did and all that Jesus taught. It includes all of the Prophetic and Apostolic Scriptures. And Paul holds us accountable to the whole counsel of God.

False teachings shed the authority of Christ and the Scriptures in favor of human passions. Paul picks up this warning again in 2 Timothy 4. He says, “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.”

Paul calls the teaching of the Apostles *sound*. And he takes such things seriously. Ideas matter. The Gospel has clear theological principles that we are called to embrace. Paul says, “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, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing.”

*Sound* in Greek is a medical term. And Paul uses it throughout the Pastoral Epistles to speak of spiritual well-being. It means something like *healthy* or *wholesome*. And it is what he wants for Timothy—and the Church in his care.

Think of eating lots of fruits and vegetables—a shot of extra-virgin olive oil—and getting your ten thousand steps in every day. This is sound—wholesome—healthy. Solid biblical teachings—especially “the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ”—produce spiritual well-being. Jesus Christ is the beginning and end of all sound theology—and holy living.

Martin Luther said it this way, “I have found and noted in all histories of the whole Christian Church that all those who have maintained the central doctrine of Jesus Christ in its integrity have remained safe and sound in the true Christian faith. Although they erred and sinned in outer respects, yet they were finally saved. For if anyone stands firm and right on this point, that Jesus Christ is true God and true Man, all the other articles of the Christian faith will fall in place for him and firmly sustain him.”

Now, sadly, the same could not be said of these false teachers in Ephesus. Because they did not maintain the central doctrine of Jesus Christ, they did not remain safe and sound in the true Christian faith. This is why Paul is so harsh, saying that such teachers are

puffed up with conceit and understand nothing. And the result of their theological errors is trouble in the Church.

We should not blame orthodox Christians when there is controversy. It is heterodoxy—something other than right teaching—that makes the Church sick. False teachers have “an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.”

And notice that when the rubber meets the road for these false teachers, they do it merely for money and status and selfish gain. Remember that religion was big business in Ephesus. The Temple of Artemis was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. This was a pilgrimage site and cosmopolitan city connecting two parts of the Greek and Roman Empires.

These false teachers were likely introducing some ancient form of the so-called prosperity gospel. This is still around today with many television preachers. They promise God’s blessing if you will give to them first. They get rich by making grand promises for God—promises He has not made—to the poorest of people. It’s really just another pyramid scheme. But this time with a Christian veneer.

These kinds of preachers even prey on our own hearts. Greed, covetousness, and the idolatry of wealth come so very easily to us. We mistake money for God’s blessing. We mistake money for God. It gives us a feeling of security. Money changes everything—or so we think—and until it doesn’t.

This is why Paul himself was so careful in how he handled money. In 2 Corinthians 2, he says, “For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God’s word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.”

Christ did not come to make you wealthy. And, “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils,” as Paul says here. Wealth can easily become an idol. Think about all the families that fall apart over money disputes. In our society, we allow the pursuit of money to overshadow all of our God-given vocations. We don’t use our money well. We fail to help others when we have the opportunity. We forget that God gives wealth so that we can help others. It is only a tool—nothing more.

And we forget Jesus’ warning in Matthew 6, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Follow the money. It will show you your heart.

But, Jesus offers us an alternative. “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.”

Paul picks up on this as well. Instead of the pursuit of money as our highest good, godliness is the gain we should most seek. Paul says it this way, “Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment.”

This word *godliness* is interesting. We talked about this word back at the beginning of July. I am sure you remember. It is used in 1 Timothy 3, “Great indeed, we confess, is

the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.”

The word can describe someone who is devoutly *pious* or *profoundly respectful of God*. But notice that Paul connects godliness with a sound confession. It is not just about our passions—although that is an important element. Godliness is good theology that flows from the Gospel. It is the knowledge of Jesus Christ in the heart and mind. And it is a deep commitment to follow where He leads.

So, Paul would have our lives marked by godliness—and he pairs godliness with contentment. And this suggests a strong reliance on God—for our ideas—in our conversations—for the direction of our lives—and even for the way in which we view money and possessions. A Christian is not self-sufficient. No one is self-sufficient.

In 1 Corinthians 4, Paul makes this case with two rhetorical questions. He asks, “What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it? nothing that we have that we have not received.”

God is our Provider. This is even true of the non-Christian. In Matthew 5, Jesus says, “He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” We Christians just simply confess this reality. We find peace and contentment in His provision. We trust Him. And even more, our sufficiency is in Christ. And when we have Jesus, we have all we need. And thus, even with a simple life—with food and clothing—we are content.

Discontentment is life’s burglar. It steals God’s blessings. It robs every other experience of its God-given joy. Someone who is discontent is always operating at a loss. Discontentment can manifest itself in all kinds of ways—get-rich-quick schemes, gambling, sports betting. If you are constantly focused on what you do not have, you fail to see God’s gifts. Paul wants better for us.

Contentment is knowing that if I am not satisfied with what I have, I will not be satisfied with what I want either. Discontentment always wants something else—something more. It is always thinking about what it lacks.

King Solomon was one of the richest men who ever lived. The Bible states that Solomon received 666 talents of gold—about twenty tons—each year of his 40-year reign. Just his gold would mean a personal fortune of billions of dollars. When factoring in his land, palaces, architectural projects—and his control over regional trade routes—historians place his total value closer to the trillion-dollar mark.

He wrote Ecclesiastes late in life. And even though it all went wrong—in immorality and idolatry—he still found a moment to write about his own failures in the end. There is even a tone of repentance that marks this whole book.

In Ecclesiastes 5, he takes up the topic of money. We can learn something here. He is worth hearing. “He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity. When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes? Sweet is the sleep of a laborer, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep. There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt.”

Tonight we talked about false teachers who promote greed and gain rather than godliness. We talked about the deceitfulness of riches. We found warnings about the desire for riches—and the trouble such desires bring.

And we talked about sound teachings—specifically the blessings of godliness with contentment. This is what Paul wants for us. Christ offers us true treasures. What the human heart actually craves is not gold—but God Himself. We were made for the eternal—and living for the gifts rather than for the Giver is a tragic mistake. It is in Christ alone that we find true meaning, purpose, joy, and even satisfaction with our lives.

I like the way Paul says it in Philippians 4. And pay close attention to what Paul is saying here—and what he isn't saying here. Life is not about the abundance of our possessions. And focus less on yourself—and more on the goodness and provision of God. And this is a good place to leave things tonight.

“I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. 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. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” In the name of Jesus. Amen.

*+Soli Deo Gloria+*