

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Godly Contentment or Regrettable Alternatives?

And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. (1 Timothy 6:8–10, KJV 1900)

If someone with infinite wealth were to tell you that he would personally ensure that you would have food, clothing, and shelter for the remainder of your life, how would you react? You'd never be hungry. You'd never go without necessary clothing and shelter, a form of "raiment" or covering from the elements. Think before you answer. How would you react? Doesn't God have infinite wealth? He says that—

I will take no bullock out of thy house, Nor he goats out of thy folds. For every beast of the forest is mine, And the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: And the wild beasts of the field are mine. (Psalm 50:9–11, KJV 1900)

I have been young, and now am old; Yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his seed begging bread. (Psalm 37:25, KJV 1900)

And here is the magnum opus of them all.

Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? (Matthew 6:30, KJV 1900)

Now our dilemma stares us directly in the face. God has given us this promise, but how do we react to it? Do we ever have enough reserve funds in the savings account? Will we ever think we have enough invested for our retirement? Where is this contentment of which Paul writes? I fear that we have too long—and too longingly—looked back to the leeks and garlics of Egypt and longed to go back there, despite the Lord's leading us to a better place.

Do we perhaps react more like the Israelites who left Egypt than faithful children of the King? When reminded of God's promise that He will supply us with food, do we thank Him and rest in that peace, or do we complain? "I know God says that, but does He include steak and lobster once in a while?" When we read the words that He shall clothe us, do we say a thanksgiving prayer, or do we complain? "Clothing, yes, but I want a Nordstrom's wardrobe, not a K-Mart closet." As our

country deals with the agonizing pain of a financial crisis, we read the occasional survey results that indicate that Christians are as likely to find themselves in hopeless debt as non-Christians. When I raise this point, I do not refer to the hard-working believer who finds himself laid off from a twenty year job because his employer fell upon hard times. I'm referring to the believer who consistently lives above his means and, just like unbelievers, drives up credit card debt to the thousands of dollars and pays the card's exorbitant interest rates with a monthly minimum payment. I've talked with believers who complained that they simply could not donate as they'd like to the church because they had to work on their \$50,000 credit card debt. Yes, that is correct! These folks desperately need to read what Solomon wisely writes in Proverbs about the problems of debt.

But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. Our King James Bible's language is precise. Notice Paul's description of these people. They "...will be rich...." That is, they are willing to be rich. They have decided that they are not content with God's rich provisions. When God commands them to "...will..." to be His disciples, even if it means loss of life, ego, or selfish ambitions, they instead "...will..." to be rich.

Before Christians ever experience the consequences of active sin, they have labored long over the question of "will." They know what God teaches is right, but they have engaged their will in a direction that contradicts God's teaching. The mind and body follow the will. Thus, in our lesson, Paul goes to the source of the problem, the will. Believers who pick up the dangerous infection that entice them to wealth apart from honoring God has set the course headlong into the consequences that Paul names in this lesson. They are willing to compromise their faith, their peaceful conscience, their deepest, and Biblically informed, convictions, all for the desire, the will, to gain wealth.

Paul does not teach that all wealth is evil. Following this lesson, he will remind us that the problem, the sinful issue, does not lie in the money, but in the believer's love for it, specifically a love that seeks to rationalize compromising what he/she

knows of Scripture for the gamble to gain it. In fact, God even reveals in Scripture that, at times, He actually intervenes to enable His children to gain wealth.

But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he swore unto thy fathers, as it is this day. (Deuteronomy 8:18 KJV)

In this passage, God gives some of His children special power to gain wealth, but He gives that power with the intent that the wise child who enjoys this blessing will use it to God's glory. Is it not right to honor the One who empowered us to gain? I have been richly blessed to know a few faithful, dedicated believers who received this blessing. In each case, they used the blessing to bless others, not to enrich or to magnify themselves. And they never forsook their faith in the process or forgot why they had wealth or how they should use it. These people "willed" to serve God first and foremost—and without compromise. For them, this God-given wealth was not a compromise to their faith, but a tool to help God's children in need.

We cannot leave the passage until we have paused to look carefully at the dangers of a will that makes the gaining of wealth more important than serving God and His people.

1. First, these foolish people...*fall into temptation...* Sometimes the Bible uses this word, temptation, to refer to a test, as when God "tempted" Abraham. On other occasions, the Bible uses the word to refer to sinful enticements, as in James 1:13. Clearly in this lesson, Paul uses the word as James used it. The will that has forsaken God and devotes itself to the gaining of wealth has charted the course into the dark, stormy waters of one sinful enticement after another.
2. As the believer whose misguided will nudges him/her to the gaining of wealth falls into one enticement after another, the next outcome is unavoidable, ...*and a snare*. While this misguided soul goes all-out for wealth, he/she increasingly becomes like the hungry animal who spies a tasty morsel, never noticing that the morsel is attached to the trigger of a trap. You can't "steal" the bait and avoid the trap. You can't foolishly pursue wealth for the wrong reasons and avoid the downside, the hopeless and nearly endless list of snares that destroy your faith and your Christian witness. How much can you enjoy that ill-gained wealth from inside the trap?
3. The list continues. ...*and into many foolish and hurtful lusts*. Over time this compromised believer's desires change. They may have started with some delusive notion that wealth would enhance their ability to serve God and

do well, but, the deceit soon gains the upper hand. The desire to use money for good reasons slips into the shadows, overpowered by one or another of a long list of sinful desires. Inherent in God's prohibition against lust is the moral character of the thing desired. "Thou shalt not covet..." in the Ten Commandments gets double-headlines. In both cases, the thing coveted, lusted after, categorically violates God's moral character and commandments.

4. And the list ends as it began. ...*which drown men in destruction and perdition*. The believer who bit the bait, who lost his/her way in pursuit of wealth, cannot end up on the positive side of the ledger. Paul doesn't depict an occasional negative issue. He used an analogy that indicates a flood, a "drowning" flood of one destructive problem after another. The word "perdition" was translated from a Greek word that means ruin or waste. It is pernicious and devastating. In terms of this person's godly testimony, it is often final and irreversible. When they are long gone from this world, they will be remembered, if at all, for the wrong reasons, not for their stalwart godliness.

Consider this simple question. When you die and your family and the minister are speaking at your funeral service, how do you want them to remember you? I've preached funerals for over fifty-five years. Not one time have I seen a loved one comment regarding how much money the dead person left or how much the deceased made in his/her career. At that point, more important issues dominant loved-ones' minds. If someone were to raise the question of financial gain, the people who most cared for the dead person would likely be offended and respond, "Who cares about that?" And well they should.

Today, you and I have a golden opportunity. As we face today, and all of our today's that lie ahead, with all the decisions we make, we can write our obituary. We can carve into our loved-ones' memories exactly what we want them to remember about us. Do you want them to sing that haunting song, "The Cat's in the Cradle," as they recall the endless times that you prioritized your career or your financial status over your faith or time with them? Or do you want them to recall priceless times when you and they forgot everything but the moment and fully enjoyed that moment with each other and with your loving God? Do you want them to recall your many compromises and financial struggles, or would you prefer that they recall your exemplary faith in God and your devotion to your faith above career or investments? You get to choose today, but the choice you make today will linger for years to come. It will become your personal legacy. What will it be?

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor