

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## Godly Riches

*Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life. (1 Timothy 6:17–19, KJV 1900)*

Over the years I have been blessed to know several godly people who happened also to be reasonably wealthy. I have also known some wealthy people whose wealth literally made them miserable. They never felt as if they had enough, and they were driven beyond reason to do whatever they could to get more. The challenges of managing one's possessions with godly wisdom, in contrast with becoming possessed by one's possessions, are formidable. Jesus made this point with a wealthy man who sought His instruction. Although Jesus didn't challenge the man's claim to have kept all the commandments from his youth, He did shock the man with a simple point. Despite the man's opinion that he had done everything Scripture taught him to do, the words he heard from Jesus must have stung him deeply.

*Yet lackest thou one thing.... (Luke 18:22)*

If we, like this man, think we have the ability to gain heaven by what we do, these words would alarm us profoundly. The man trusted his possessions far more than he trusted God.

I have discussed this passage—and this man—with people who believed the man was lost and hell bound unless he took the additional steps that Jesus directed. Like the man, these people errantly believe that their works earn heaven for them. However, when we examine Mark's narrative of this same event—and the same man—we learn more about him.

*Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest... (Mark 10:21a)*

Contradictory to contemporary sentimental-based beliefs, God's love for His beloved and chosen people is eternal, and it is also exclusive of the wicked who shall spend eternity separated from Him. God does not love the wicked who shall be forever separated from Him.

*The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity. (Psalms 5:5 KJV)*

David did not write that God hates the deeds of the workers of iniquity. No doubt that is true, but it is not what the verse says. The verse clearly states God's personal hatred for the people whose sinful life defines them as "Workers of iniquity."

Since Mark tells us that Jesus loved this man as He reminded him of his lack, we know that Jesus did not view this man as a "Worker of iniquity." They are engaged in a discussion about godly questions, not at all a description of a depraved, unregenerated (not born again) sinner. Folks, children of God, even children of God who have been taught the truths of the gospel, can become confused, follow bad priorities, and need the reminders of Scripture such as Jesus' words to this man and Paul's words to Timothy regarding rich people under his pastoral care.

Let's break down the lesson to learn what Paul directs Timothy to teach wealthy disciples.

1. *That they do good....* "Good" is a moral quality, not simply something that we find winsomely attractive. The Greek word translated "good" in this verse is defined as "...to engage in doing what is good." Peter used the same word in 1 Peter 2:20, "...when ye do **well**...." The primary Biblical obligation of a wealthy disciple of Jesus is no different than for a poor disciple. A proverbial "No brainer," material possessions are immaterial to our Christian ethical obligation.
2. *...that they be rich in good works....* Rich or poor, people commonly reveal what they regard as valuable to them by their attitude and conduct. Rather than boasting of how much they possess, Paul directs these people to keep their life's focus on doing what glorifies God, not what earns interest in their investments.
3. *...ready to distribute....* People who are too occupied with material wealth, either keeping it or desiring to gain it, focus on getting and keeping. To "distribute" means to give up, to share, the opposite of getting and keeping. John defines the opposite of this trait for us. *"But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have*

*need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" (1 John 3:17 KJV)*

4. ...*willing to communicate*.... All three words were translated from one Greek word; that word generally describes liberality. Consider an example that addresses this principle. Let's suppose that a local community discovers a family that has endured one tragic loss after another, despite working hard and living honorable lives. A news reporter interviews them and obtains their permission to run a story about them and their need. They agree. The reporter sets up a blind bank account for compassionate citizens to use if they wish to donate funds for this family's distress. Among the large number of ordinary folks who may send \$25, \$50, or \$100, the reporter receives letters from two wealthy citizens. Both of them ask to remain anonymous. They do not care to be praised for their assistance to this family. They simply desire to help. The first wealthy person offers to match the funds donated by the community. If the local citizens with their individual donations give a total of \$5,000, this wealthy citizen will write a check to the blind bank account for \$5,000. The second wealthy person sends a \$25,000 check to the bank account with directions to the bank not to reveal his name. Clearly both of these wealthy citizens were liberal in their actions, but, on the scale of liberality and measured by the admittedly superficial scale of how much was given, the second man was more liberal than the first. Both men, however, demonstrate the principle that Paul here teaches, for both were quite willing to give liberally of their possessions.

5. ...*Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come*.... While many commentaries attempt to frame this verse so as to teach that the wealthy who perform these godly duties either earn their eternal life thereby, or at least enhance their position in heaven, the Geneva Bible's footnote makes a far better point. "The praise of liberality, by the effects of it, because it is a sure testimony of the Spirit of God who dwells in us, and therefore of the salvation that will be given to us." Godly behavior **gives testimony** to others of the Holy Spirit's presence and influence in our lives. Rather than engage in a complex theological refutation of the idea of liberality either earning or enriching a person's eternal existence with God, I offer a simple observation from the passage itself. Paul did not write "Laying up in store...against eternity." He rather stated

that the godly conduct of wealthy believers lays up a foundation "...for the **time** to come." This simple statement cannot reasonably be interpreted literally as a reference to timeless eternity, when Paul so specifically framed it in time. Simply stated, I suggest that Paul teaches that what wealthy believers do liberally with their possessions now to help others shall result in blessings from the Lord to them **in time** to come.

6. ...*that they may lay hold on eternal life*. If a person "Lays hold" on something that is not his, he commits theft. If he "Lays hold" on something that is his, he is simply putting his possession to good use. We might view this statement from Paul as 1) summarizing the whole list of godly behaviors that he has taught the wealthy to practice, or 2) adding yet another godly practice to the list. Either view requires that wealthy believers keep their first priority on God, not on their material wealth.

Let's wrap up this section of our study with a highly informative verse from Deuteronomy.

*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 sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day. (Deuteronomy 8:18 KJV)*

God wisely enables some of His children to gain wealth, but the words of this verse affirm the points we've studied from Paul. God gave these people the power to gain wealth so that they would use it to His glory, not to feed their personal pride. Perhaps the Lord at times prevents some of His children from gaining too much material wealth because He knows that they would not be able—or willing—to put it to godly use. Like the wealthy man who went to Jesus, wealth for them would soon possess them and compromise their godly faith-walk.

Sandra and I have never been, by any stretch of the facts, wealthy. Most of our life during my secular career was spent closer to a "Hand to mouth" budget than with making choices about what to do with excess funds. During my career, I worked in two businesses that laid great emphasis on wealth. My first exposure when I was rather young and inexperienced, definitely put the temptation before me, and nicely decorated it to make it look ever so appealing. I look back and realize that the Lord delivered me from myself at that time. Later, at a time when I had matured more in my career, and more importantly in my faith, I started a business and was blessed—I truly believe I can see the Lord's hand in so many ways turning what could have been financial disaster into success and blessing—to be comfortably successful. That experience turned into a blessing

that enabled us to move into retirement, financially able to live in reasonable comfort and to give time and effort to ministry without significant financial anxiety. The lesson for us has been life-changing. Serve God and keep your heart focused on Him, and He will provide your needs wisely, lovingly, and with grace. I preached this point for years before I fully experienced it.

Standing guard over this whole teaching and directing us to its wise truth is the Biblical principle of godly contentment, or as Paul specifically stated the point, "...godliness with contentment..." (1 Timothy 6:6) Has the Lord blessed you with more possessions than you need at the moment? Thank Him and be content with it. Prayerfully put your excess to godly use. Have you struggled to get ahead, to build even a modest financial cushion, but it never came? Thank the Lord that He has blessed you to meet your needs, and pray for His liberal kindness to be with you against future unknowns. In either case—in all cases—never forget the command. Godliness comes first. Practice it without compromise. But you have only gone half-way down the path of obedience when you practice godliness. Now it is time for you to work on contentment. One of the saddest sights of my life has been to see the occasional godly person who is miserably discontented with his/her present state. Godly contentment builds between God and us, based on our fellowship with Him, and it thrives wholly independent of our material circumstances. The task is no less challenging than the first step, attaining consistent godliness in our conduct. But, when we follow this passage and finally bring both godliness and godly contentment together, the incredible blessing shall leave you richer than Warren Buffett or Bill Gates.

The principle of "...godliness with contentment..." reaches far deeper into our lives than our bank account or investments. It covers every aspect of our life and particularly of our discipleship. Do you strive to live as close to the Lord as you can possibly live, but you simultaneously struggle with lingering discontentedness? The passage applies to you no less than to a believer who is struggling for contentment against the problem of material possessions. Lay hold on eternal life. Put that treasure from God to active and God-glorifying use today. You, dear child, belong to a noble—and wealthy—family. You are a "Child of the King," and you have a priceless inheritance waiting for you in glory. Ah, but your gracious King has released a rich portion of your inheritance for your blessing right now. Lay hold on it and put it to His wise use.

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Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
Pastor