

**NBC Devotional**  
**May 17, 2023**  
**“Godliness With Contentment Is Great Gain”**

There is a phrase in 1 Timothy 6:6-8 that really captures my attention. It is the phrase we find in verse 6: “Godliness with contentment is great gain.” As I have thought more and more about this statement concerning “Godliness with contentment,” I have realized that we can play around with the wording of this statement and come up with three important philosophies or approaches to life that characterize the life of many people in our world, both Christians and non-Christians alike.

When we play around with these words “Godliness with contentment,” it strikes me that many Christians approach their life in a slightly different way than what we read about in 1 Timothy 6. It would seem that some Christians have taken this statement and readjusted it a little bit to fit their own approach to the Christian life, and they end up with a life of “Godliness without contentment.”

I. Godliness without contentment

Just think about this for a moment. One of the saddest things I think we can see around us among many Christian people is that many believers seem to be pursuing a life of godliness without contentment. Have you ever noticed this? Why does it seem like so many Christians don’t ever seem to smile? Why do some Christians never seem to be able to laugh or have a good time? Does this make sense to you? It does NOT make sense to me! In the gospel of Jesus Christ, we have the greatest and most exciting news that has ever been revealed on earth. Through Christ’s death and resurrection, we can be forgiven. Even greater still, we can actually experience victory over death and sin. Through Christ, God can change and transform our lives completely, and he gives us a purpose for living! How incredible and great is this?! And yet many Christians walk around like someone just stole their lunch! It doesn’t make sense.

It reminds me of a story I heard about the great preacher Charles H. Spurgeon. Spurgeon was emphasizing to his preaching class the importance of making the facial expression harmonize with the topic of the sermon. He said, “When you speak of heaven, let your face light up, let it be irradiated with a heavenly gleam, let your eyes shine with reflected glory. But when you speak of Hell—well, then your ordinary face will do.”

Well, it sounds funny to hear this, and yet many Christians’ faces seem to reflect hell a whole lot more than they reflect heaven! I don’t think this is right. Paul reminds us in 1 Timothy 6:7 that “we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.” So why such long faces? The fact of the matter is that our circumstances here on earth are fleeting and momentary at best. But the life that Christ offers us is eternal! It seems to me that our faces, our attitudes, and our demeanor should reflect this great promise better.

## II. Contentment without godliness

But there is also a second approach to life that can be illustrated by playing around with the words “Godliness with Contentment.” In fact, many people in our world approach life with this second philosophy and approach. Namely, many people go through life seeking after Contentment Without Godliness. Contentment without godliness.

There are many people in our world who want to have contentment, happiness, and pleasure, but they don’t want God to have any part of this. In fact, they often deny any role to God in life at all. They often say, “I don’t need God. I can handle everything in life on my own, thank you very much. Only weak people need a ‘god’ to go running to for help. I’m fine on my own. I don’t need God to find contentment and happiness.” Does this approach sound familiar to you? I’m sure it does, because we can see this approach to life in people all around us in the world. These are the people who seek contentment without godliness.

I think it is interesting to look at the Greek word that is translated “contentment” in this passage. It is the word *autarkeia*. Literally, this word is a compound word made up of two different Greek words. The first word is *autos*, which means “self.” The second word is the word “*arkeia*” which means “enough, or sufficient.” In other words, those who pursue Contentment without godliness think that they are “self-sufficient.” They have enough, and they are enough in and of themselves. They don’t need anything else. They have it all figured out. They are self-sufficient, and God or godliness is not needed at all.

I find it interesting (and also quite tragic) that a person can sometimes go through life like this for a while and get away with it. But eventually, ultimately, something will go wrong, and the whole “house of cards” of their life will collapse around them. I have seen it happen, and it is so tragic and sad. They bet all their life on their own self-sufficiency, and when it falls apart, it falls completely apart!

I am reminded of one of the episodes from the old "Alfred Hitchcock Presents" TV show. The episode was about a pretty woman who was serving a life sentence in prison. Angry and resentful about her situation, she had decided that she would rather die than to live another year in prison.

Over the years she had become good friends with one of the prison caretakers. His job, among others, was to bury those prisoners who died in a graveyard just outside the prison walls. When a prisoner died, the caretaker rang a bell, which was heard by everyone. The caretaker then got the body and put it in a casket. Next, he entered his office to fill out the death certificate before returning to the casket to nail the lid shut. Finally, he put the casket on a wagon to take it to the graveyard and bury it.

Knowing this routine, the woman devised an escape plan and shared it with the caretaker. The next time the bell rang, the woman would leave her cell and sneak into the dark room where the coffins were kept. She would slip into the coffin with the dead body while the caretaker was filling out the death certificate. When the caretaker returned, he would nail the lid shut and take the coffin outside the prison with the woman in the coffin along with the dead body. He would

then bury the coffin. The woman knew that there would be enough air for her to breathe until later in the evening when the caretaker would return to the graveyard under the cover of darkness, dig up the coffin, open it, and set her free.

The caretaker was reluctant to go along with this plan, but since he and the woman had become good friends over the years, he agreed to do it. The woman waited several weeks before someone in the prison died. She was asleep in her cell one night when she finally heard the death bell ring. She got up, picked the lock of her cell, and slowly walked down the hallway. She was nearly caught a couple of times, but she had avoided being seen. Her heart was beating fast. She opened the door to the darkened room where the coffins were kept. Quietly in the dark, she found the coffin that contained the dead body. She carefully climbed into the coffin, and pulled the lid shut to wait for the caretaker to come and nail the lid shut.

Soon she heard footsteps and the pounding of the hammer and nails as the lid to the coffin was nailed shut. Even though she was very uncomfortable in the coffin with the dead body, she knew that with each nail she was one step closer to freedom. The coffin was lifted onto the wagon and taken outside to the graveyard. She could feel the coffin being lowered into the ground. She didn't make a sound as the coffin hit the bottom of the grave with a thud. Finally, she heard the dirt dropping onto the top of the wooden coffin. She knew that it was now only a matter of time until she would be free at last.

After several minutes of absolute silence, she began to laugh. She was free! She was free! Oh, it was wonderful to realize that her plan had worked, and she would soon be free.

After a little while as she waited in the coffin, she began to feel curious about which prisoner had died and made her soon-approaching escape possible. So, she decided to light a match to find out the identity of the dead prisoner beside her. When she struck the match and brought the flame close to the face of the dead person, she discovered to her horror that she was lying next to the dead caretaker himself.

The final scene faded to black as you heard the woman screaming.

There are many people who try to pursue contentment without godliness. But sooner or later, their plans will fail miserably and tragically. This is NOT the approach to life that Paul recommends to anyone. And I would strongly advise any of us from accepting and pursuing this kind of godless life. It will only end in tragedy.

### III. Godliness with contentment.

The third approach to life that Paul DOES recommend to his readers is the pursuit of Godliness with Contentment. This is the life that true followers of Christ have discovered. Christ offers us a peace and a joy that the world can never give and also that the world can never take away. This is a contentment and joy that is found in Christ alone, who lives within one's heart. Jesus is the source of our joy, not our circumstances! And so regardless of what is happening around us, we

can find true contentment and satisfaction in every circumstance and situation. This is the essence of Godliness with Contentment that Paul talks about in 1 Timothy 6.

Several years ago, I was teaching an online class on the Book of Acts. As you all know, we always have our online students submit their autobiography to the newsgroup so that we can get to know each other better. One of my students was a young woman who told the class about her own conversion and growth in the Lord. A woman who played a big role in this growth was an older woman by the name of Mrs. Thoen. Listen to what my student wrote about Mrs. Thoen.

“I met Mrs. Thoen in 1990 when Desert Storm had taken my husband to war. The children and I lived next door to her during the months he was gone. Mrs. Thoen was a toothless, deaf, skinny lady whose diet consisted mainly of Twix candy bars. Our houses were so close together that my three children, if they lay on the ground end-to-end, almost spanned the distance. She loved me, she loved my kids, and she loved Jesus with all her heart, mind, soul...and voice. Almost every day, she would call me on the telephone to ask, “What are you doing for the Lord?” She called rather than come over because the amplifier on her phone was the only way she could hear my voice. My answer usually had something to do with housework. She always loved that answer and praised me every time for my godly attention to my family. Yeah...I was just trying to get us from dawn to dusk in one piece. Hardly godly, I thought.

In turn, I watched her closely. Mrs. Thoen was always doing something for the Lord. She visited shut-ins. She talked to strangers about Jesus. She prayed. Really prayed. I knew it because I could hear her. Deaf as she was, the sound of her voice carried through the walls of our two houses into my kitchen where I would listen in amazement at the intimacy of her talks with God. What would it be like to be so free that you could pray at the top of your lungs and not care who heard you? I wanted a faith like Mrs. Thoen’s. She encouraged me to read the Bible and obey it. My journey of faith bounded forward under Mrs. Thoen’s watchful care. Living next door to her, I could see movement in my life. I could see change.”

This student went on to say that Mrs. Thoen was the happiest person she had ever met. Despite the fact that she was weak, deaf, and battled many different sicknesses, she loved God with a joy and a contentment that changed her life! This is what Godliness with Contentment is all about!

I would like to challenge you to allow God to unleash his joy and contentment over your life. True contentment is found in God alone, through the indwelling presence of the Spirit of Christ. If you are not experiencing this kind of contentment and joy, the answer is not found in finding a new job or a new home or a new family. The answer is found in Christ himself. Allow him to fill your life with his Spirit, with his joy, and with his promise. Indeed, Godliness with Contentment is great gain!

Amen!

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