

**Christian Ethics, Pt. 2: The Principles of Contentment**

Scripture: Hebrews 13:5-6

Code: 1640

Hebrews 13. We've called the thirteenth chapter "Christian Ethics," or "The Believer's Behavior." As we saw last time, the book of Hebrews resolves in chapter 13 in a series of practical exhortations. And we were reminded again of a principle of which we have reminded you on many, many occasions, and that is this: before there is ever exhortation to duty, there is instruction in doctrine. Doctrine is the foundation on which duty is built. Your obedience to a given standard doesn't mean anything unless there's a reason for that standard. And so doctrine always precedes duty. Position always precedes practice.

Now we have been seeing for twelve chapters principles of the new covenant. All of its dimensions have been spelled out. Now in the thirteenth chapter, he branches from there, and simply says, because of all of this, because of who you are in Christ, because of what is yours in Christ, because of what is yours in the new covenant, this is the kind of behavior patterns that we expect from you. All through the book he has presented Christ, and he has said you can cling to Christ--He is sufficient, He is superior, He is supreme, He's all you ever need, and that's been the repeated message over and over again. And to sum it up, he says now that you have Christ, here is how you ought to live. And believe me, people, no man will ever be able to follow these ethics, unless he knows Jesus Christ. Or he has no power to do so.

But again we see that same principle. The practical life is only possible when we have come to a knowledge of Jesus Christ, and the foundation of sound doctrine. In Romans 12:1, "I beseech you therefore by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies." In other words, he is beseeching you on the basis of the mercies of God. What are the mercies of God? They're all the doctrines in the first eleven chapters. On the basis of all that He has done for you, here is what you are asked to do for Him. That's essentially what Scripture says in the New Testament in terms of doctrine and duty. Always the doctrine, and then the duty.

And this is so very, very important, because if we're going to proclaim our doctrine to the world, we're going to have to match it with our life, right? If I tell you that a certain soap really cleans up, and I have been using it for years, and I stand before you looking like the dirt man in Mobil commercials, you're going to be a little reluctant to believe that that soap does what I say it does, and rightly so. If I tell you about an outstanding automobile that is better than any other car, and I wish I could show it to you, but it's in the shop getting fixed, you're a little reluctant to believe that that automobile is all that I made it sound. And that's right--you ought to be. It's the old story--my life doesn't match my mouth,

then you really don't hear what I'm saying, do you? And so that's exactly what we see here. If my pattern of living can't corroborate my doctrine, I have nothing to say. So it's a circle. You have a sound doctrinal foundation, which issues in duty, and strong testimony in duty gives you then the opportunity to pronounce the foundation again in the face of somebody else. And so the cycle continues as you are based on doctrine, and live according to the standards which doctrine sets down. You then could reproduce those standards without being double-minded or ashamed of what you're saying because you don't live it.

God wants us to witness to the world. God wants us to be able to communicate. In order to be able to communicate, we need to live the kind of life that backs up our communication, and that's really the essence of chapter 13. Here's the life you'll have to live if you're going to stand in the face of the world and proclaim the cause of Jesus Christ. And believe me, if we do not support Christianity by our lives, then in the face of the world we make God a liar. We make Jesus Christ a fraud; we make Christianity a joke if our lives do not support what we say. So practical holiness is strategic before the world in terms of the proclamation of the doctrine which we have been founded upon. We must live the kind of life that is needful in order for people to listen to what we say.

Now with that in mind, we've come to this chapter. We mentioned last time, in great emphasis, that we have an obligation to witness to the world, and that that witness is dependent upon how we live. If in the office you cannot order your living to fit your speech, you might as well not speak. All you're doing is confusing, and I think I told you about the guy that I met in prison, and he told me he was a Christian, and I told him not to tell anybody. Only because of the fact that he'd gotten there while he was a Christian and he was going around telling everyone what a wonderful Christian he was, and it was obvious from the way he was living, and he was a member of a Christian organization, supposedly in the ministry, etc. If you're going to be able to announce Jesus Christ to the world, you ought to be able to back it up with your life.

Now let me give you a second thought. We covered that a little bit last time; you don't remember, I know, but we did. Second point: we not only are instructed to really live the kind of Christian life that the standards of which are set down in chapter 13 for the sake of witness, but secondly, for the sake of our own personal joy. You know, a Christian who does not live according to God's standards lives apart from the joy that is his. You can't sin and disobey all of God's standards and be a happy Christian. It just doesn't work that way, because you're living against what you know is right. That creates guilt, and that creates insecurity, and so forth, and so on, and pretty soon you're a miserable, unhappy person. And so, standards of living are given not only as a witness to the world, but as a source of joy to the believer.

My greatest joy is when I know I've been obedient in responding to the standards of the Lord. I mean, if you think sin is fun, try holiness. You know, back in Psalm 19, and we'll start there--there's some interesting statements. Don't turn to them, because I'm going to go through several, just note them in

your mind. "The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eye." Obeying God's standard brings joy, that's exactly what it says. Take it a step further in Psalm 64:10 we find similar instruction, "The righteous shall be glad in the Lord." In other words, the man who lives a righteous life is a happy man. Psalm 68:3 "But let the righteous be glad. Let them rejoice before God. Yea, let them exceedingly rejoice." A by-product of righteousness is rejoicing. You want to be a happy person, do right. Obey God's standards.

God's standards are given then, number one, as I mentioned last week, and not necessarily in the order of importance. Number one is the fact that they're given so we live a life that is a clear testimony to the world. Number two, that you might have joy. Psalm 97:11 takes it another step: "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." Happy people are people who obey God. That's what it's saying. And then, of course, if you want to study Psalm 119 all through that Psalm it just repeats that same principle. Psalm 119:111 for example, "Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage forever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart." The word "testimonies" means the commandments, the instructions, the statutes, the law of God. What makes me most happy, says David, is obedience to God's standards.

Christians have this strange idea that you should sin and that's what is really fun. Believe me, it just comes back in your face every time, doesn't it? Haven't you been there? I have. Ecclesiastes 2:26, "For God giveth to a man that is good in His sight, wisdom and knowledge, and joy." Isn't that great? Ecclesiastes 2:26. Do you want joy? Be good in His sight. Not in the sight of the world. You can have a carnal goodness in the world and never know the difference. If you want to really be good, be good in the sight of God. Obey His standards.

Jeremiah 15:16, "Thy words are found and I did eat them. And they were in me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Jeremiah said I took Your law and I made it mine and I was happy. You know, it's a sad thing, but you just meet a lot of grumpy, grouchy miserable Christians. And believe me, you can go right back to this. A miserable Christian is one who is not obeying the principles of God, or he would have what? Joy! So, you know how to take care of your lack of joy. It all boils down to that one word that keys the whole Christian life, and we give it to you again. Here it comes. Obedience.

So the principles of God then, for the believer have two dominant results: one, a clear testimony to the world. In other words, we don't undo everything we try to do by not living what we say; two, personal joy. And let me tell you something, these two are inseparable. Because you get to be a joyous Christian and people are going to come to you, just like they came to these guys and say, "You've got something different." And so really, evangelism just comes as a result of overflowing joy.

People have a hard time handling somebody like that. Happy people just do something to people. They say, "You have something I don't have." I'll tell you something else: When you clearly communicate your faith to somebody else, that becomes joy too, doesn't it? They're interchangeable.

In 1 Thessalonians 2 Paul expresses it. You say, well, here's a guy like Paul, what made him happy? What did he get really excited about? What just gave him super-kind of joy? Listen to this: 1 Thessalonians 2:19, "What is our hope or joy, or crown of rejoicing?" What makes me happy? "Are not even ye in the presence of the Lord?" You say, what makes you happy Paul? When people get saved, that's what makes me happy. Verse 20 "For you are our glory and joy."

You say, well, is that the only thing that made him happy? No, suffering made him happy. Philippians 2:17, "Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all." In other words, if I die and you get saved, I'll die. If I have to get stoned, and you hear the gospel, I'll get stoned. It doesn't bother me. And he wrote to the Philippians and says, "Therefore, my brethren, dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown". The joy of Paul was the salvation of others. The salvation of others came about because Paul's life matched his words. Joy and witness are inseparable. You can go at it either way. Seek to have a clear witness and you'll see people saved and you'll have joy. Seek to have joy and you're going to have a witness people won't be able to resist, right? And so, really, the kind of life we live results in those two inseparable things.

Now to bring this into real clear focus, in the book of Hebrews, in the thirteenth chapter, he lays down the principles of conduct that can bring about the salvation of others and joy to our own selves. I told you last time that there are three things that we want to look at in this chapter, and sooner or later we might get to them: one is ethics, two is example, and three is energy. If we're going to live the kind of life we ought to live, we need to know the ethics. What are the standards? Secondly, we need to have an example; we need a pattern to follow, don't we? Thirdly, we need to have the energy or the power to do it. So we need the standards, the example, and the energy.

First of all, what were the ethics? Well, remember last time when we began to look at the ethics in the first 19 verses, we told you there were three categories in the Christians' conduct--three categories of practical Christian living: one, in relation to others, right? And that he begins the chapter with, in verses 1-3, and in those verses he lays down two basic features of Christian conduct toward others. The first one was sustained love. We saw that in verse 1, "Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unaware." He says let brotherly love continue, sustained love, even towards strangers.

Now, in this particular passage, we have something that we might call an overall principle. When we talk about Christian ethics, you could go down the line. You could list dozens and dozens and hundreds and hundreds of little rules that could apply to the Christian life. Don't borrow your neighbors shovel and fail to return it. Don't hit your husband in the back of the head with the rolling pin when he's not looking. Don't do this. You know, you could make a list that would never end of little rules. Or you could just say this: let love continue. There's no sign in our kitchen for my wife to read which says don't hit your husband in the back of the head with the rolling pin. There's no sign in the kitchen that says don't beat your wife. Don't smash your kids. Don't cut off their fingers or something

like that. You say, well, you don't need a sign to say that. No, I don't--you know why? Because I love them, and love pre-cludes the necessity of all those other rules.

And so to begin with you can reduce Christian conduct to a simple, common denominator. There it is--love people. And before you say, Oh, I just can't get it worked out, let me remind you that love is not an emotion, it's a principle. Don't ever forget it. Love is not a, I don't get emotional about certain people. I don't say, Oh, there's Mr. So-and-so--love, love, you know. No, no. Love, in the Bible, is not necessarily emotional at all. It is a principle, and if you want to know what kind of a principle it is, read 1 Corinthians 13. It's a principle of self-sacrifice. It doesn't matter what kind of a so-and-so Mr. So-and-so is--you need to condescend to help him, to meet his need, to care for him, to bear his burdens, to pray for him. Those are principles that have handles on them. Those are not ethereal, foggy, pie-in-the-sky, lovey-dovey kind of squashy emotions. Listen, we're not talking about something that's just kind of syrupy. Love is a basic principle. It's the principle of self-sacrifice, based on humility, isn't it?

Now I want you to be reminded that love comes immediately when you're saved. "The love of God is shed abroad," where? "in our hearts." So the love is given, all you have to do is keep it. You don't have to work it up, just keep it. It's already there. You don't need to run around looking for love, and say oh, God, give me more love. There's no more to give, He gave you all He had. You just need to take what He gave you. And it never changes.

One of the most wonderful chapters in the Bible, and one which I particularly enjoy is the 13th chapter of John, and I just read you one verse, "Before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." His love never changes. Jesus' love never changed at all, never, never, never. Whose love has been placed in you? Jesus' love. It never changes. Why? Because it is not an emotion, it is a principle of self-sacrifice. And it doesn't matter what's going on, it's the same. And you have His love. Paul said this, "For the love of Christ constrains me." Did he say "my" love for Christ? What did he say? The love of Christ in me makes me do what I do. It isn't my own. You have his love, just let it continue. That's what he's saying. Let it continue for strangers. Why, he said, you'd better be careful, somebody entertained angels unawares. You don't know who you're being nice to.

Back in Genesis 18 Abraham put out a nice spread for three visitors and found out one of them was God. And two of them were angels. Now that isn't to say get ready because angels are coming to your house. Not at all. But that does mean that God sometimes will bring people into your path that you need to be very careful to show love to, because you just don't know who you have on your hands. And it's not just for your benefit either. Maybe they have a tremendous need, and a word of love from you can turn a life around. You know that? How many times have people said to me, "John, my life was such and such and such and I met so-and-so, and in just a moment of time, my life was

changed."

There's a second ethic that we want to mention by way of review. Not only sustained love, but sympathy. And this really comes out of love. It's just another dimension of it. And that's in verse 3, "Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them." Do you know really, what sympathy is? To suffer with, literally, empathy. To get inside and feel what somebody feels. You have to be a selfless person to do that. If people are in prison, do you feel that? Those who suffer adversity as being yourselves also in the flesh? In your own body, do you know what people go through when they go through pain? Remember this morning, when we studied about the church that prayed for three days, day and night for Peter? They felt what he felt, didn't they? They were hurting because he was hurting. That's sympathy.

You know, sympathy can be shown in three ways, at least. Many ways, but here's three interesting ways in the New Testament. Second Timothy 1:16, "The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chain. But when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently and found me. The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy in the Lord in that day and in many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, thou knowest very well." You know one way to be sympathetic? By your personal presence with somebody in need. That's sympathy. Just being there, where they are.

Here's another way. Not only just in your presence but in certain deeds that you might do. Philippians 4. Paul needed some sympathy, he was in jail. Phil 4:14, "Notwithstanding you have well done that you did share with my affliction. Now you Philippians know that in the beginning of the Gospel when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me as concerning giving and receiving, but you only." In other words, nobody gave me any money to carry on my ministry. "For even in Thessalonica, you sent once and again unto my necessity, not because I desire a gift, but I desire fruit that may abound to your account." I'm glad you're giving, not because I get the money, but because when you give, you get blessed. Verse 18, "But I have all and abound," I'm full, "having received of Apaphrodites the things which were sent from you. An odor of sweet smell, sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God." Another way to show sympathy is by deeds of love. Not only your personal presence but by doing deeds of love.

There's a third way to show sympathy to somebody and that's by prayer, praying for them. Colossians 4:18--Paul closes Colossians with these words: "Remember my bonds." Hey, he says, don't forget I'm in jail; pray for me. Now this is our basic obligation to other people. To love them with full care and sympathy, and really, beloved, that's all you need. That's the only rule you need in terms of other people, isn't it? Because if you love them you're not going to break any other laws. I mean, it doesn't say here, and he could have said don't lie, don't steal, don't cheat, don't envy, don't injure, don't misuse, etc., etc. And all he says is this: don't fail to keep on loving.

Look at Romans with me, would you, in chapter 13 for just a brief moment, and I'll show you something there. Romans 13:8--for all of you who are in debt at this time and have unpaid bills, this will be a serious verse--"Owe no man anything, but to love one another." You know something, there's only one debt we're to owe people, and that's the debt to love them, and it's a debt, the more you pay, the more you owe. You never get off the hook. "Owe no man anything but to love one another. For he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For the law says don't commit adultery, don't kill, don't steal, don't bear false witness [which means to lie], don't covet, and if there be any other commandment, you could put them all together in one saying. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. For love works no ill to its neighbor, for love is the fulfilling of the law." That's why, you see, in Hebrews 13 it doesn't need to list a whole lot of things. All it needs to say is just love, and that'll take care of the law. And the hang-up in the Old Testament was they didn't have the love of Christ in them to do that. So they needed all the little rules.

In the New Testament Christ just gives us His love, and says now just sustain it. And you never need to worry about the rule. That's like one guy said love God and everybody else, and do what you want. That's right. If a man loves, he won't kill. Love never seeks to destroy. And listen to this. Love can't hate. Love will seek to destroy an enemy by making him a friend. If a man loves, he'll never steal, for love doesn't take, what does it do? It gives. And if a man loves, he will never covet, for covetousness, which means the uncontrolled, inordinate desire for self-satisfaction, if a man loves he'll never covet because love is not self-centered, it's self-less, you see. So love is really all he needs. In fact, Paul says, "Love is the bond of perfection." It ties everything together. So love is the basic ethic toward others. We've been through this before,

All right, second thing. What about the Christian's conduct in relation to himself, to ourselves? How do I conduct myself toward myself, to live the kind of life that is witness to the world and joy to me? How do I live toward myself? Number one, sexual purity, sexual purity. Now, the word sex has become you know, there were taboos in the past, and sex was a word that was a taboo many years ago. You just didn't say that word. It was a terrible word. And now sex is everywhere.

There's another taboo today. You know what word is taboo today? Death. If you want to really mess up a conversation fast, just interject that. Because we're living in a hedonistic society where the moment is everything, and sex has become a way of life. Death is the thing nobody wants to face. And so he says, sexual purity, verse 4. "Marriage is honorable in all." And really, we told you it should be translated, "Let marriage be honorable in all, let the bed be undefiled, for fornicators and adulterers God will judge." Sexual purity, and we live in a world that's going crazy over sex. It's not that people's desires are any different, it's just that if society will let them do more things, they'll do it. And Romans 1 says they get real clever and they invent new things.

People in our society have gone crazy in the area of sexual fulfillment. When two people allow their passions to run away with each other, when two people allow themselves to get caught in a compromising situation sexually, let me tell you something, friends. It is not that they love each other too much; it is that they don't love each other enough. It is that they love each other too little to respect each other's purity before God. And I say to you, if a guy comes to you girls and says I love you so much, give me what I want, he doesn't love you very much at all. Believe me. His love hasn't developed where the most important thing in his life is your beauty and purity and holiness. When he sees you like that, then he really loves you.

Now, you say, why is this a sin against ourselves? Well, that's what Paul said, you see, in 1 Corinthians 6:18. He said, "Flee fornication, for every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he that committeth fornication [pornea, sex sin] sins against his own body." You see, you have to live with this in your own flesh. This is a sin against your own body. The purity of your own body has been defiled. And so God says I desire sexual purity.

You know, it's a tragic thing, I'll never forget a college kid coming to me one time, just shattered. I mean, she was a mess, and she said, "I have only been a Christian a little time. I got into a youth group, and the president of the youth group was the first Christian I ever met, and one night he asked me out on a date, and I thought, the first Christian I've ever gone out with, and I thought oh, how wonderful to be out with a Christian. How different it'll be from what I'm used to." She went out with this guy and before the night was over, he had destroyed her purity, and she was destroyed. She was a shaken, and shattered and torn individual and the whole of Christianity crashed with that guy. She was shattered. The last I knew, her life was just destroyed. That's tragic, and that isn't the only time it's happened.

Our purity in the sexual area is so very, very important. And while God is not against sex, He invented it. And I'll tell you, He knows what He's doing. It's a beautiful thing; it's a fulfilling thing. And in marriage, nothing sexual within the bounds of reason is wrong. Outside of marriage, everything is wrong. And don't think, well, I've read the Late, Great Planet Earth and the Lord might come, before I get married. I mean, then what? Ken Poure always says, "Well, I suppose well, if God invented that for down here, whatever's going on in heaven will be a lot better, so don't worry about it. The point is, God desires purity. First Timothy 5:22 gives you a simple phrase that you ought to remember. Put that in the front part of your brain and don't ever forget it. Three words: "Keep yourself pure." Not like Ivory Soap, 99 and 44/100 percent, but totally pure. Keep yourself pure. Flee sex sin. Run when you see it.

Joseph ran into Potiphar's wife, and she thought Joseph was really a good catch, so she got old Joseph in the bedroom, and she started seducing Joseph. Do you know what he did? He did the only smart thing--he ran. He didn't say, now I'd like to tell you where I stand on this. He bailed out. And on the way, she grabbed his coat, and that's what got him in jail. But God exalted him, didn't he? Just run



Jack, pack up and get out. Remember what he said? How can I do this wickedness and sin against God? You think he didn't know that was sin? I've heard Christian people say they didn't think sex outside of marriage was wrong. Joseph said it was a sin and a wickedness against God.

If you need some evidence, Genesis 39:9 ought to be sufficient. You know what David did? Got up there on his roof, and looked over there and saw that honey Bathsheba, and he managed to bring Bathsheba into his presence, killed her husband, and he knew what he did. When it was all over, remember his words in Psalm 51:4. This is what he said, "Against thee and thee only have I sinned, and done this evil." He knew it was wrong.

Personal purity is always a battle. It's a battle for everybody. The Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:27, "I beat my body to bring it into subjection." And you today, Satan tempts, and with all the media you just have a hard time getting away from it. But there comes a time when you need to. You need to run. So many Christians have had their testimony destroyed, and their own personal joy sucked right out of them, because of sin in this area.

Well, the second thing in terms of an ethic, really involving ourselves is not only sexual purity, but satisfaction, verse 5. Let your manner of life be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have, for He has said I'll never leave thee or forsake thee." Here's another thing, satisfaction. Not only sexual purity, but towards ourselves we need to have satisfaction.

Are you satisfied with what you have? This follows very closely on the idea of sexual activity, because you know, that's a great area of temptation, isn't it? Just because you're married doesn't mean that Satan doesn't sometimes tempt you to long after something else. The forbidden one. That's covetousness, and covetousness is a terrible evil. Whether it's coveting a neighbor's wife, or coveting money, or things or possessions, material things, whatever it is. It's a gross thing.

In fact, the leaders of the early church couldn't have that, as a part of their character at all. In 1 Timothy 3:3 it says that bishops are not to be given to wine, (not supposed to linger long beside their wine in the Greek) not violent, not greedy of filthy lucre. That's just not allowed. And not only that, Paul said to Timothy in the same book, 6th chapter, 6th verse, but godliness with contentment is great gain. You want to really be rich--be happy with what you have. Godliness and contentment.

You know, Spurgeon said one time "In all my life, I've been in a lot of testimony meetings, and I've heard a lot of people share how they've sinned, and I've had people come to me and make confession of sin; in my life I've never had one person confess the sin of covetousness to me." And I've only been around a few years, and I've never had anyone confess it to me, either. I've had a lot of sins confessed. I had a guy walk in my office a couple of weeks ago and he said John, I just have to confess my sin to you. He was a broken up guy, and we prayed together, and he said my sin is gluttony. And I said, you look terrific, you're not even overweight. And he said, oh, I know, but do I

want to be. He said, I crave it, and I only fight against it, just continually. There are a lot of sins that people confess, but I stand where Spurgeon does. In my brief years, nobody ever confessed to me they were covetous.

But you know something, that's a sin that everyone of us fights, isn't it. Be honest. The bigger thing, the better thing, more money, promotion, bigger house, bigger car. This is a temptation for all of us. Nicer clothes, all of these things. And it's a very serious thing. God says I want you to be, in a word, satisfied. Godliness with contentment is really being rich, isn't it? You know the rich man is the man who has all that he needs, and the knowledge that God has everything he'll ever need. That's what the verse says. "Be content with such things as ye have, for He has said I will never leave you or forsake you, so that we may boldly say The Lord is my helper, I will not fear what man shall do unto me." Take everything I've got, what do I care?

Now you know these Hebrews to whom he's writing, had lost a lot, hadn't they. Remember chapter 10, verse 32-34, he says you lost everything. And there might have been a few of them saying boy, we got to get back what we lost, and they were getting sidetracked on earning back their wages, and getting back their money, and trying to find their inheritances that they had been robbed of, and they were maybe digging back in that direction, and he simply says to them, hey, just be satisfied, will you, and don't worry if somebody took everything you have. If you have the Lord, you have it all. Do you believe that? If a man has everything, and has not Christ, he has nothing. If he has nothing, but has Christ, he has everything. Let's face it, you're going to lose it anyway. Either here now, or in the next few weeks, or in a few months, or when you die, or when Jesus comes.

I've often wondered to myself how people can amass fortunes in this world and then die, when you could invest it all in God's work. You see what covetousness did for Adam, for Baalam, who loved the wages of unrighteousness the Bible says, what covetousness did for Achan. God said don't take anything; he took a lot of things, buried it in a hole in his tent and thought God couldn't find it. I'll put it in this hole--God will never know.

Remember the story of Namaan the leper, came down there and told him to go down to the river? I heard one preacher preach on the story of Namaan, and called it seven ducks in a dirty river. He went down to the river, and seven times he went dunking in the water, and the sixth time nothing happened, and he didn't want to do it because he was a dignified guy, said what's the matter with the rivers where I live, why do I have to come in this crummy Jordan? Seventh time he came up clean, he said I want to pay you; I want to pay the prophet, remember, I want to give him all the stuff that he brought down. Prophet said no, took off and the prophet's servant was just dying. "Take that stuff, take it, take it and we'll split it." So he fires down the road and old Gahazai takes off after him, remember the story? He gets down there and says I just met two men who are in great need. Liar. He didn't meet anybody. He says, I'd like a talent of silver, one, one, one of everything. The guy says hey, you can have two of everything, and he loads him up. And he goes back and he faces Elijah and

Elijah says you know what you get--Namaan's leprosy. And that's what he got.

Remember what covetousness did to Judas? Remember what covetousness did to Ananias and Sapphira? They lied to the Holy Spirit and dropped dead right in front of the church. Covetousness is a very serious sin and God deals with it, very very seriously, believe me. It is not a trifle.

Now the most common form of covetousness is the love of money, lusting after material riches. Now I want you to look at the verse 5, "Let your manner of life be without covetousness." The words "without covetousness" is one word in the Greek, *aphilarguros*. That comes from three words. "A" is what is called an alpha privative which negates the word. *Phileo* means to like. *Arguros* means silver. Covetous means to like silver--to love money. *Aphilarguros* means to be without the love of money. And so he says you should be satisfied without the love of silver. If you begin to love money, you are sinning against God. You know what the result would be? Ineffective testimony and lack of joy in your own life. Luke 12:15, "And he said unto them take heed and beware of covetousness for a man's life consists not in the abundance of things he possesses." Did you get that? That's not life. Lusting after material riches is sin.

Now I'm not saying it's wrong to have money, it's just wrong to lust after it. The Bible doesn't say money is the root of all evil. It says the love of money is the root of all evil. In fact, you know, Deuteronomy 8:18 says God is the one who gives you power to get wealth, and some of the wealthiest men in the world were godly men, weren't they? Job, Abraham, and even today. But here's the key exhortation, and don't forget it, Psalm 62:10, listen to this: "If riches increase [and they might] set not thine heart upon them." Did you hear that? That's the key. You may get it; if you get it, don't love it. And that's exactly where the injunction needs to be given.

In Job 31:24, "If I have made gold my hope or have said to the fine gold, thou art my confidence [put all his confidence in money] if I rejoice because my wealth was great, because mine hand had gotten much. If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness," and he goes on and on about all these things, and he comes down to verse 28, "this also was an iniquity to be punished by the judge, for I should have denied the god who is above." For a man to love money is to deny God. That's what he said. There's no place for covetousness.

In 1 Timothy 6 let me read you these words, and these are important words, and there's much here. In verse 6, "But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment, let us be therewith content." If you have food and clothing, be content. Where are you going to get that? Did God promise to give you that? Do you ever have to worry about what you shall eat? Do you ever have to worry about what you shall wear? No. Do you ever have to worry? No. Do you ever worry? Yes. "But they that will be rich fall into temptation." It doesn't say the rich fall into tempta-tion, but they that will be rich.

I always think of John D. Rockefeller, one time was asked how much money he wanted. He said a million dollars. He made a million. The same guy said how much you want. He said I want another million. You see, there's a law of decreasing satisfaction. "They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and many foolish hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil, while some having coveted after it have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows, But thou, o man of God, flee these things." We just heard that back about sexual purity, didn't we?

Here are two standards for the believer's own life--sexual purity and satisfaction. Run from sexual sin and run and covetousness. Don't ever get into the position where you're more concerned about your bank balance than your spiritual life. You're to learn to be content with whatever you have. Remember what we studied on Wednesday night? The Psalmist says in Psalm 37, I've been around a long time (I love this) and I've never seen God's children begging bread. Isn't that good? Ecclesiastes 5:10, "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he that loveth abundance with increase." Isn't that interesting? It's the law of diminishing returns. The more you have the more you want. People are kept from salvation by the love of money, and Christians are kept from joy, they're robbed! Don't be covetous.

Then he quotes Ps. 118:6 "The Lord is your helper, what are you going to fear?" They steal everything you've got--what do you care? Discontent is sin, beloved. Discontent is sin! You say, well, John I'd like to be content, how can I really be content? How can I get off this thing of wanting money, and wanting to lay away money, and getting all absorbed in money, and spending it. And you know, you can--loving money comes in all forms, in getting it. Some people express their love of money in getting it. Building it up, making more. Some people express their love of money in keeping it, see, just miser, you know. And every dime they give is like blood. Other people express their love of money by throwing it around in front of everybody. I was walking down the street in Santa Barbara with Dale Smith, and we came across a Cadillac showroom, and there was a Cadillac in there that was so long--I'd never seen anything like it. So we said let's go in and look at that thing. We went in there and the guy informed us that it had the biggest hood in the history of auto-making. It was mammoth--you'd need about two guys to get it up. And I said will somebody actually buy that? It was white, with bright red interior, convertible, with red painting all over it, and big

chrome--it had everything under the sun. You know there's only certain kinds of people who would put the top down, put on some kind of stuff--their clothing thing, and just cruise. And that's a kind of exhibition of the love of money. But there's all forms. Some people, you don't know they've got it, but they love every dime. All forms of the love of money. How do you get content? How do you get over that hump? Let me just give you some quick things, and we'll wrap up.

First of all, the realization of God's goodness. I think contentment comes when you realize God is good. Did you hear that? Paul said "All things work together for good to them that love God." Paul said, "My God shall supply all your needs." Do you know God's good? If he's good, will he take care of you? O.K.

Here's another thing. Do you want to be content? Realize God is omniscient. You know what that means? He knows what you need before you ever ask. He knows what you need. You can put Psalm 37 down there, 18, 19 and 25--never see the Lord's children begging bread. Luke 12:30.

The third thing, realize this, and you'll be content. Realize what you deserve. Just sit down and ask what do I really deserve? You'll be content. Genesis 32:10, listen to this: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies." Is that right?

That's right! You know what I have? Everything I have I don't deserve. I'm rich.

Let me give you something else. Realize God's supremacy. That is, realize God will give you what He thinks you need. And He'll supply what you need for all the things in your life. And realize that, for some people, God wants them to be poor, and for others, He wants them to be rich. And He has a plan. First Samuel 2:7, interesting verse, "The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich." Did you know that? The Lord is in charge of all that. "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, lifteth up the beggar from the refuse to set them among princes, and make them inherit the throne of glory." In other words, if a guy comes from nowhere to somewhere, God brought him. God makes the poor, God makes the rich. God brings people up who come from nowhere and earn fortunes. Just realize He's omniscient. He knows who gets what, and He's also powerful. He gives who gets what. He's supreme.

The fifth thing to realize is this. Realize what true riches really are. You know who's really poor--the world? Colossians 3:2, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." Do you really know true riches? Do you really know what is rich? You're so rich in Christ.

Contentment comes from realization of all those things. Then secondly it comes from communion. Do you spend time with God? Let me tell you something. The longer you concentrate on His glory, the less you're going to care about money. When you're lost in Jesus Christ, you are so overwhelmed with how rich you are, that you could care less about anything else. So realization and just communion. Well, the world's going to pass away, and everything in it, right? So you don't want to lay up treasure on earth, lay it up in heaven.

God set some standards for you; we just got through our review. Next time we're going to take up the next standard for the believer's life which is steadfastness.

Let's pray. Father, we thank You that we've been able to have a little time to study Your word tonight. We've really reviewed some thoughts from a different angle, Father, knowingly because they're important to be understood and learned. Father, so many things have happened tonight as we've gathered together, what a joy it's been Lord. We think about the world, and so many people sitting at home and looking at a television hour after hour, seeing inane things. We think about the crowds we see at the theater and at the bars and restaurants. They've all gathered together to spend time, and we've been with those we love, and we've been studying the Bible together; we're rich. Father, we're thankful. Help us to cherish every moment we've spent tonight. Thank you for the songs that were sung, that took our minds and hearts to thoughts of thee. Thank you for the testimonies that were given that made us rejoice over what you're doing in lives. Thank you for the word which spoke to us, for the Spirit who superintended it all. Father, now as we come to a closing moment, we pray that we might be able to bring to mind all of the thoughts that the Spirit has planted within us. Father, we think of the words of the German philosopher, who said "You show me your redeemed life and I'll be inclined to believe in your Redeemer." Father, may we as Christians realize that we have an obligation before the world to live a life, such a life that men can see our good works and know consistency with what we say and give glory to our Father in heaven. And Father, such a consistent life that we know the full joy that Jesus gave. Lord, there also might be some here tonight that have never met you. They've never come to Christ. And they've heard the joy and the love that has come out of the young man who testified, and maybe tonight's the night when your Spirit is going to do a work in their life, a work that is eternal. We pray that you would do it. Thank you for our time; we acknowledge Thee in all these things, and thank Thee in Jesus' name. Amen.

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