

Title: Craving or Contentment (beware of the hissssss)  
Text: 1 Timothy 6.2b-10  
Theme: Warning against false teachers (again)  
Series: I Timothy  
Prop Stmtnt: People who use the gospel to exploit others are committing the deepest level of betrayal because they are betraying Christ.

Read Text:

A friend of mine took his wife out for dinner on Valentines Day. The restaurant was full of couples, as you might expect. But then he noticed something. Everyone was looking at their phone. No one was actually having a conversation. They were at the same table, but apparently, not in the same place. Look, if you are going to go to all of the effort to go out to eat on Valentines Day, shouldn't you at least try to have a conversation? But, for some, the purpose was the event, which meant that the event had lost its purpose. Does that make sense? I think that is how some of you may view church. You are here, but you aren't really here. It is something you do, because you are expected to do it, or you are in the habit of doing it, but your whole being is not really engaged. You are more of an observer rather than a sold-out, all-in, jump in the deep end, person. And there are reasons for that.

Some of you are not followers of Christ yet. You are examining the gospel. You are considering the claims of Christ. You are looking at this critically. Good. Keep looking. Keep asking questions. We want that.

Some of you assume you are followers of Christ, but you just don't take this gospel stuff too seriously. I mean, it's a nice thing to have, that going to heaven when you die sort of thing, but you have your life to live right now, and you'd rather not let God mess up what you have planned for your life. So, you come, you sit, you're here, sort of, but in reality, you are like the couples in the restaurant. You're not all here.

If the gospel is not true, then all of this really doesn't matter. No matter what we do or say, if this gospel that we believe is not really true, then all of this is absolutely inconsequential, irrelevant, meaningless and a colossal waste of time and money. However, if the gospel is true, then there is NOTHING that is more important, more urgent, more significant, more meaningful and more practical. It's one or the other. However, what the gospel cannot be is "kind of important" or "sort of meaningful" or "interesting from a distance." It is either totally meaningless or infinitely important. There is no middle ground.

The Bible does not describe church as an event you attend, or nice things for your kids to do. The church is built on truth that is to hijack your life and demand your highest commitment. The church is not a building on a road, but a people who are your family, forever. The truth of the gospel is controversial, glorious, demanding, life-changing, heart-grabbing, soul-arresting and eternally significant. I cannot pretend to you that it is anything less than this. That is why, there is an urgency in this text that Paul is writing to

Timothy. He is beginning his conclusion of this letter and he says, "Teach and urge these things." As a church, therefore, we do not teach in order to amuse, entertain, or simply inform. We teach for life change.

### 1. We teach for life change.

The things that Timothy is to keep teaching and keep insisting upon refer back to what he has just covered beginning in 5.1. The point is, keep calling people to live in view of the gospel by calling them to live for others. The gospel, rightfully believed and applied is going to help people grow in godliness. Godliness is the goal (slide). Godliness means to look more and more like God. It means to hope more and more in God, which will result in being more and more satisfied in God and more and more honoring and caring for others. Serving and honoring others is a fruit of the gospel.

But, many will use the gospel as a means to serve themselves instead of others. The betrayal is almost beyond words.

Less than two years ago, local doctor, Farid Fata was sentenced to prison for 45 years because he told people that they had cancer, when they didn't and treated them with chemotherapy. 553 people were told that they had cancer, who did not have cancer and that they had to have chemotherapy. To use the trust that patients generally have for a doctor, and to take advantage of the seriousness of cancer as a means to lie to someone in order to enrich yourself is beyond disgusting. But, it is an even greater tragedy and a deeper betrayal to use the cover of the gospel as a means to enrich oneself.

What is Paul telling Timothy to teach and urge? He is exhorting him to keep teaching people to, for the sake of the reputation of God, and for the advancement of the gospel to lay down your life and give honor to others. Because of the gospel, grace, love, kindness, generosity, ministry, honor and help goes from us to others. The gospel changes us from people who live for self to people who live for the advancement of the joy of others and the spreading of the fame of God. So, what happens when someone uses the gospel as a means for advancing their own agenda, or furthering their own glory, or as a means to get rich? It is a devastating betrayal and must be warned against.

Again, if the gospel is not true, then it really doesn't matter. No matter what we do or say, if this gospel that we believe is not really true, then all of this is inconsequential, irrelevant, meaningless and a colossal waste of time and money. However, if the gospel is true, then there is NOTHING that is more important, more urgent, more significant, more meaningful and more practical. It's one or the other. However, what the gospel cannot be is "kind of important" or "sort of meaningful" or "interesting from a distance." It is either totally meaningless or infinitely important. There is no middle ground. Do you see that? If you see that, then you will see that anything or anyone who in anyway seeks to reframe the gospel, or redefine the gospel is putting poison in the water supply.

People have to have water to live. If you want to kill everyone, put poison in the water. When you use the language of the gospel as a covering for teaching lies, you are putting poison in the water. This is a big deal. Therefore...

## 2. **Tolerance of false teaching cannot be tolerated.** (3-8)

For the third time in this letter, Paul warns about false teachers (1.3-11; 4.1-5). One of the primary responsibilities of the leaders in the church is to be on guard against false teaching and to address it when it happens. You live in a world that says that you are free to believe whatever you want to believe and to discover whatever works for you. In other words, the world says that YOU are the final dictionary. You define the terms of right and wrong. You are the determiner of reality. The result is chaos. I was talking with a man last week who has a physician friend in another state who was told by a couple, unless we are having a boy, we want to abort. The physician is a believer and refuses to perform abortions. When the couple discovered that they were having a girl, they demanded an abortion, and he refused, so they sued him and they were awarded millions of dollars. Does that make sense? Feminism demands abortion so that people can kill girls. I do not expect our world to make sense. Our world has rejected God, which means that our world has no ethical basis upon which to have any coherent or consistent basis for making decisions of right and wrong. Therefore, I expect it to be full of hypocrisy like that. However, you cannot bring into the church and teach anything other than what Christ has established as being truth, or the church will be just like the world – only worse. Tolerance of false teaching cannot be tolerated.

But, the false teachings (and teachers) are already in the church and the church has to learn discernment to be able to identify it and address it. Paul is warning about various ways in which false teaching and false teachers gain influence. In v.3 he warns about teaching doctrines that do not line up with Christ and the gospel. In verses 4 and 5 he warns about teaching that is done for the wrong goal.

### A. **Examine the content** (3a)

In v.3, Paul uses the teaching of Christ as the standard. He calls them “*the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ*”. The teaching of Christ is like holding up genuine currency. When teaching is not consistent with that, then something is wrong. The gospel is not really the gospel if what is being taught and being called the gospel is not consistent with what Christ taught.

What Christ taught, how Christ lived, how Christ died, how Christ arose all created this massive amount of trust. The closer you got to him, the more you saw how impeccable he was. The more you were with him, the more you saw how holy, how loving, how consistent, how faithful, how true, how absolutely flawless he really was. There was no chink in his armor. There was no hole in his holiness. He was perfect. If someone uses the name of Christ as a means to say something that is wrong, then they are abusing the most sacred trust that has ever been established. This is a warning to guard what is being taught in the church. Truth is at stake. Godliness is at stake as well.

## B. Examine the fruit (3b-8)

### 1) Does it produce godliness?

The phrase, “*and the teaching that accords with godliness*” speaks of looking at the fruit of what is being taught. If Lucas has a teaching ministry in the church and he creates this little group of disciples in the church who start hanging out with each other and not with any one else, and over time they start acting like they are just a little better than everyone else, and some start indulging in certain sins and all in the name of “freedom in Christ” they are not accountable, and going down a wrong road, you can know this: whatever is being taught and how it is being taught is wrong! You do not have to know exactly what is being taught to know it is wrong because the fruit is the evidence. It does not accord itself with godliness.

### 2) Is there conceit? (4a)

Evidence of ungodliness is seen in conceit. When you have teachers who say “I know something that you don’t know” beware. Do you see it now? A person who is filled with conceit tries to leverage a position of influence in order to draw attention and affection to himself while a person who is filled with Christ tries to draw attention and affection to Christ and the joy of others. If you see smoke, you know there is a fire. A teacher who disagrees with Christ is puffed up with conceit.

Think of this. How blind can one be to go argue and disagree with Christ? How big of an ego would you have to say that you can correct Christ? If someone is teaching something that does not accord with what Christ taught and does not produce godliness, then, that person is puffed up with conceit and instead of being smart and witty, actually understands nothing. Teachers like this are not interested in making disciples of Christ, but are trying to make disciples of themselves.

### 3) Is there dissension? (4b-5a)

There is clearly a time and a place for discernment. But discernment is not an excuse to being a jerk. Some people who are not happy unless they are creating controversy and even then they are not happy, because they are not at rest. People who disagree with the gospel are disagreeable. People who always stir things up, are themselves stirred up. People who are always in the middle of conflict are themselves conflicted. People who are always arguing are not at rest. Playing the devil’s advocate is not a spiritual gift.

### 4) Is there dissatisfaction? (5b)

This is very insightful, isn’t it? Look at that phrase, “imagining that godliness is a means of gain.” Imagining is one of several words that Paul uses in this text that speak of the mind longing for things.

There is a lot of emphasis in this text on desires. What do you crave? What do you long for? What is your fantasy? What do you imagine? What is the image or scene where you are getting all that you want out of life? If you could have everything that you ever wanted, right now, what would that be? What is it that you believe will bring you the ultimate satisfaction? What is it that you believe will rescue you from frustration and hardship?

How you answer that question is what you believe will save you. You are tempted to believe lies. You are tempted to believe that if you live in Hawaii, or if you had a different wife, or if you had a wife or if you had a different job, or if you had more money, or if you had different parents, or a better education, or different parents, that you would then be satisfied. You are tempted to believe those lies. Therefore (and this is a really big therefore) you are tempted to believe people who tell you what you are already tempted to believe. And when someone appears to validate what you are tempted to believe, you like that and you are probably willing to pay money for someone to tell you what you want to hear. It is easy to imagine that godliness is a means to gain.

But, that is why the prosperity gospel is so toxic. Godliness is not the goal. God is not the goal. Gain is the goal and godliness is what is used in an attempt to get the gain. Gain (materialism, power, respect, influence, money – whatever) is what the soul trusts instead of trusting God. But the language of trusting God is employed (sometimes in a self-deceiving way) in an effort to get what I want (gain). But, even if I got all of the gain that I could ever imagine, it would not satisfy. Our hearts, Augustine famously said, will never be at rest until they are at rest in God.

#### 5) Does it produce contentment? (6-8)

Who owns you? What can you live without? When are you tempted to panic, fear, be anxious? Loss of health, loss of money, loss of esteem, loss of family, loss of stuff... There are things that you can lose, and yet still be full, when you have God. But if you don't have God, then no matter what you have, you are never full.

Slide poor vs. rich vs. dissatisfaction vs. contentment

Illustration: faced with losing everything, and realizing that the rock you stand on hasn't moved. That is freedom. Being owned completely by God is perfect freedom.

### 3. Beware of the hissssss. (9-10)

The desire to be rich is in contrast to the desire to be godly. This is a warning that is primarily aimed at those who are not rich but long to be. It is a warning because their desire to be rich is revealing something about their heart. They really do not trust that God is enough. God is a means to what is enough and being rich is what is enough. Being rich is what will satisfy. Being rich will mean that my soul will be at rest. No it won't!

But v.9 is part of this warning to false teachers and that is why the third point is: Beware of the hisssss. The hissssss is the sound of the snake in the garden that says that if you have money, then you have power, you can be like God. But, the hissss is clever enough not to say it like that. The hissss will say, "If you were rich, imagine how much good you could do for others." Is there a measure of truth to that? Yes. But, you do not have to be rich to do good for others. If you do not honor and serve others when you are not rich, you will not start if you ever get rich. Honoring and serving others is not a matter of money, it is a matter of the heart. The hissss will say, "If you were rich, imagine how much you could give to the church." Is there a measure of truth to that? Sure. But if you are not generous now, you won't be generous later. The hissss will say, "If you were rich, you could do so much for the kingdom." Is there truth to that? Yes. But, if I seek riches now instead of seeking first the kingdom of God, then I am lying to myself and attempting to use "helping the kingdom" as a cover-up for simply helping myself.

When I read verse 9, I hear the sound of a toilet being flushed, and while this may sound a bit crude, I do not apologize for it. Wrong desires (the desire to be rich) is like the flushing of a toilet that will take you or anyone into a very dark place that along the way is marked by lies and disappointment.

#### **A. Wrong desires bring ruin. (9)**

A person, who desires to be rich, will be blinded by that desire. Anything we desire above God will blind us, while desiring God above all, will give us sight. When all you can think about is being rich, then you will look at everything and everyone through that lens. And here is the irony. Those who are tempted to use others for gain are themselves susceptible to be used for someone else's gain. The desire to be rich causes people to fall (notice the downward spiral) into temptation, into a snare, into senseless (sin causes brain damage) and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.

#### **B. Wrong love will destroy you. (10)**

V.10 is like a summary statement. The love of money is a (the) root of all kinds of evils. The love of money is the source, the origin of all kinds of evils that keep on growing. This is so true. The love of money is the attempt at loving something that will not love you back. The love of money is the attempt to give your heart to something that will keep lying to you and keep taking from you. Loving money is like being in the ultimate abusive relationship. You give and give and give of yourself believing that you will find happiness, you will find security, you will find love, but the money betrays you. Even if you get money, you are cursed now with the fear of losing it, or cursed with the fear of people who want your money and not you, or cursed with boredom because you don't have to work, or cursed with self-centeredness and arrogance because you believe that you are better than others.

Godliness is eternal riches. Teach that. Believe that. Live that. That makes much of God.