

But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. ⁹ People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

¹¹ But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. ¹³ In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you ¹⁴ to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen. (1 Timothy 6:6-16)

How Do We Take Hold of Eternal Life?

Have you thought about those scenes in movies and TV when someone is hanging from a ledge or a rooftop and then someone else comes and pulls them up? Often, the hero uses one hand to pull an adult to safety. It's absolutely ridiculous. Not very many people can grab a person who weighs 180 pounds or more and just pull them up. But it gets even sillier when the person who's hanging, only hangs on with one hand. Try hanging from a pull up bar with one hand and see how long you can do it. See how hard it is to pull yourself all the way up so that you can grab on with your other hand. Now thankfully, most of us never find ourselves dangling off a roof, hanging on for dear life. We don't usually have to test how hard it would be to pull someone else up. But in a sinful world, there is a sense in which we're all dangling over the edge. We're clinging to Christ in a scary and sinful world. If we let go, we're going to plunge to eternal death. So St. Paul tells us today to hold on. How do we do that? **How do we take hold of eternal life?**

I.

By being content with what God gives us. Think again about those television scenes. If you really were hanging on for dear life, I don't think you'd reach for something else. You probably wouldn't say, "Oh, look, someone dropped a dollar up here and if I just stretch a little bit, I can get it." Even if it was a hundred dollar bill, even if it was a diamond, you would be totally focused on hanging on until someone pulled you up.

God tells us today to have the same attitude about getting to heaven. Rather than being distracted and constantly looking around to see what else we could have, St. Paul says, "**Godliness with contentment is great gain.**" He reminds us that we brought nothing into this world and we can take nothing out. When Jesus pulls us all the way up into heaven, none of the treasure that we work so hard to accumulate here goes with us. So he counsels us to be focused on living a life of faith and to be content with what God gives us.

What does it mean to be content? Be happy? In a sense that's true. If you're content, you are peace with the life God has given you. Going back to that ledge illustration, if the firemen were there pulling you up, you wouldn't need them to grab that hundred dollar bill just below you. You'd be quite satisfied that they were saving your life. God calls us to look at our lives here on earth the same way. Jesus has rescued us. He's given us heaven where we will have real and joy forever. And even here, Jesus takes care of us and gives us all we need. So be satisfied, be content, with what he has given you.

That is hanging on to eternal life. How so? Well, look at the other side. St. Paul says, "**People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.**" Now, Paul is not saying that it's sinful to work hard or to save your money or to try to advance your career. He's saying that life isn't about getting rich. Our society is one of the richest societies in the history of the world. Every person here is among the richest ten percent of all people on earth today. But do feel that way? A couple of years ago, a local pastor was hosting a couple of MLC students who were in the choir that sang at his church. On the way home, as a joke, he pulled into one of the most exclusive neighborhoods in the area, and pulled up to a multimillion dollar home as if it were his. Those girls' eyes got as

big as saucers. We don't live in houses like that. How does that make us feel? Does it cause a desire to get rich to burn in our hearts? If it does, what's wrong with that?

It's the opposite of being content. It makes us mad that we don't have what those people have, doesn't it? Paul tells us to be content if we just have food and clothing. By the grace of God, my children have never gone to bed hungry. They've always had coats in the winter and a roof over their heads and heat on when the snow was falling. God has always taken care of us. But all we have to do is walk through the neighborhood to see people whose lifestyle is much richer than ours. Our sinful nature feasts on that reality. Paul warns us, **"The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."** Paul did not say, "Money is the root of all evil." He said "the love of money." I can't feed my kids unless I have money to buy groceries. But if I love money, that sinful attitude leads to one sinful decision after another.

Some people spend so much of their lives pursuing money that they lose their faith and even ruin their lives here. Think about rich people whose kids are screwed up because their dads or moms were so interested in money that they didn't take the time to love and parent them. Think about ruined marriages and lost friendships. But there's something even worse: money becomes their god. They may still be members here at Peace. They may still think of themselves as Christians. But the most important thing in their lives is money. So their church attendance is bad. Their offerings are nothing in comparison to the money God has given them. They lay awake at nights agonizing over how to get more or how to keep what they've got.

The love of money is like letting go of the ledge to grab at a few bucks on the way down. Paul tells us to be content with what God gives us, because that means that we trust in God's love and care. It's not wrong to be wealthy or to be successful at business. But it is wrong for those things to take God's place in our lives. So when we have a plan to move up, to save money, to retire, we need to always remember that success or failure is in God's hands. We need to resolve to be content with whatever the outcome because we know that our God always does what is best for us. The truth is, my friends, if we don't have something in this life, that means that right now, it's not good for us. When and if it is good for us, our God will give it to us. When we trust that he knows what we should have even in this life, we are clinging to Christ our Savior.

Do we do that? I have to admit that sometimes it's hard to accept that I'm better off having less money than other people do. My sinful heart rages at that sometimes. Does yours? Are we content in God's love? Or does money and lifestyle try to take God's place in our lives? Does it lead us to think God owes us something better? We all know that's a terrible sin. In the end, it's no different from bowing down to an idol of wood or stone. But we also know that God forgives us. He sent Jesus to be the one perfect worshipper who ever lived. Jesus was content to be a carpenter's son when he should've been living in a palace. He was content to have no place to lay his head. He was content to walk the dusty roads of Israel and to depend on others for food and to face the hatred of his enemies. He did all that for us. His contentment counts for you and me. And he died for all the times we were discontent, for all the ingratitude in our hearts for the gifts he does give us. Jesus died and paid for all the times our sinful hearts worshipped money and lifestyle. His blood washed all that sin away. We are forgiven. We are loved. Because we are, God teaches us to see this differently. Because God wants us to defeat this world and reach eternal life, he warns us of the danger and he works in our hearts through his gospel message so that we can put him first. Trust him and hold on to eternal life, where you will have all that you could ever want and more.

II.

But it isn't just the temptations that come from money that dangle us over that ledge. St. Paul steps back and calls us to true godliness in every aspect of our lives. He reminds us just how important it is to live for Christ. That's when he actually tells us to take hold of the eternal life that God has given us. **How do we take hold of eternal life? By fighting the good fight of faith.**

What does that mean? It means waging war against our own sinful flesh and the devil and the unbelieving society around us so that we can live as children of God. Paul tells us, **"Flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness."** Those are not casual words. Flee from all this danger and sin. That means run away! It doesn't mean hang around at arm's length, looking in just to see what it's all about. It doesn't mean trying to have it both ways. Flee from the attitudes that make wealth and sin desirable. And in their place pursue, chase down, hunt righteousness and godliness. Paul is

talking about living a life of faith. He tells us that it involves being gentle and enduring. How different from plunging into the daily battle for all that this world treasures!

We are in a daily battle, but it's not to get our piece of the pie. It's to avoid going to hell. It's to keep our faith alive. How do we win that battle? There's only one way: we have to feed our faith so that it is strong enough to stand. Several weeks ago, I was talking to someone who was brought up Lutheran. After I reminded him of Jesus and his work for us, this man said, "I've always believed that. I've never really gone to church, but the faith was always there." What do you think about that? We cannot look into his heart and know if that faith was always there. But we can say what God says: faith comes from hearing the message. When you don't hear the message, you weaken your faith. It is finally a sin not to feed your faith. Sin poisons faith. Now, I accept that there's a difference between weakness and hypocrisy – but a faith that is not fed is living on the edge of being lost. We lay hold of our eternal life when we lay hold of the gospel to feed our faith.

Why do we do that? Because we know that this life ends. One day, we have to stand before God – the King of kings and Lord of lords who lives in unapproachable light. We have to stand before Jesus who did not hesitate to tell Pontius Pilate who he really was and why he came to this world. On Judgment Day, we will all have to stand before him and hear his verdict on our lives. We will only enter life if he finds faith in our hearts.

Will he? Yes, he will. He gave us our faith and his power in the gospel renews it and strengthens it. But it is our job to lay hold of that gospel message and apply that power to our faith by coming to church, by going to communion, by confessing our sins and hearing that they are forgiven. Again and again, God tells us Christians to feed our faith, to fight the good fight, to flee from temptation and resist the devil. It is our job to do all that – even while we trust that all success comes from God who works through the gospel.

God will grant success. His gospel will not fail our hearts. That matters so much because there are so many times in our lives when sin wins. There are so many times when we give in to sin, and where it's clear that we didn't fight the good fight. Our faith is weaker when we haven't been faithful. There are so many times when we're just clinging to that ledge by our fingertips. But the gospel is the power of God. It is amazing what it does. If you think about it, even the most faithful Christian can only spend so many hours a day in God's word. But those few hours have so much power that they defeat the devil and keep our faith alive through all the hours we have to spend working and in traffic and dealing with life. When someone has not fed their faith, but somehow it still survives, that is a testament to the power of God in the gospel that they did hear so long ago. That power will not fail you. Come to hear that message and trust the Holy Spirit to pull you up off that ledge and into heaven. That is God's promise to you. Amen.