

Introduction:

Most of us know that Paul called himself the chief of sinners. However, other than being a persecutor of Christians, we rarely consider what kind of struggles he really faced. If you're like me, that can leave you kind of cold about the whole thing. "I mean, sure Paul you were a persecutor, but your big sin was something you thought was obeying God. You didn't struggle with real, every day sins, like me." Then I read **Romans 7:7-11**. Paul had some serious struggles, one of which was covetousness. Paul struggled with inordinate desires for what belonged to others. Life was a competition, and he wanted what others had. Who knows what kind of other sins this led to? In **Romans 7:15-20**, Paul described this part of his life as out of control. He wanted to do right, but kept turning back to sin. He claimed he simply didn't have the ability. Covetousness had conquered him.

However, this is just one snapshot in the life of Paul. Years later, as Paul has grown in Christ, he was able to say, "I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content" and "I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need" (**Philippians 4:10-13**, ESV). Through the strength of Jesus Christ, He had conquered covetousness and learned contentment. Would you like to do that? Do you know the greedy desire to have what others have? Do you find yourself depressed over losing the competition of stuff because others have more or have what you want? Would you like to know contentment and the peace that comes with it? Would you like to have better relationships because the material disparity doesn't get in the way? It stands to reason that a brother who conquered will be able to help us. In fact, in **I Timothy 6:17-19**, Paul pens four keys for conquering covetousness.

Discussion:

I. Invest in The Certainty.

- A. Imagine a financial advisor pulls you aside and says, "Listen, I've got a deal for you. It's too good to talk openly. I'll meet you at my office tomorrow at 7." What financial dreams would you think about? You get into the privacy of his office. He makes sure no one else is in the waiting room, closes the door, checks to make sure you are alone, then says, "I've just learned of an amazing investment, and I couldn't wait to tell you about it. It is absolutely guaranteed. I can assure you that just when you need it most it is guaranteed to fail. It will wipe out every bit of hope, confidence, and future." What would you think of that advisor?
- B. But that is exactly the advice many of us receive, give, and live on. We chase financial security like it is going to deliver us from all our problems and struggles. But Paul told Timothy that riches were uncertain (**I Timothy 6:17**). Moths eat material goods. Rust destroys them. Thieves steal them. Stock market crashes devalue them. Fires burn them. Floods carry them away. Mildew rots them. Just when you need them most, riches let you down. Riches cannot buy you happiness, secure your relationships with family, extend your life, or guarantee your eternity. After all, you can't take any of your possessions or riches with you when you die (**I Timothy 6:7**). However, there is a truly guaranteed investment. That investment is God. He is a certainty. He created the world. He is the sovereign keeper of eternity. Be rich toward Him because He is the one who determines your eternity. If you invest in Him, your investment will pay off with more than security for a few years down here. It will pay off for eternity. Contentment comes as we invest in The Certainty.

II. Focus on the Giver, not the gifts.

- A. We would have enough if we just had food and clothing (**I Timothy 6:8**). Most of us have much, much more. If you're like me, the problem is not whether we have enough; it is whether we have more than someone else. I have an iPad, but it's an iPad 2. I have a cell phone, but it's not even smart. I have clothes, but a good percentage of them come from Goodwill. I have a car, in fact three, but none of them are even from this century. I can easily get distracted by the wonderful blessings you have. If your car, clothes, computers are better than mine, I get jealous. Of course, I also have the opposite problem. If my car, clothes, computers are better than yours, then I get arrogant. Either side of this problem is the same. I'm focusing on the gifts.
- B. That's right, these are gifts. All I have comes from God (**I Timothy 6:17**). When I forget these are gifts, I start to think I have these things because of me. I think my self-worth is determined by my net worth. Instead, I need to focus on the Giver. Everything I have is a reminder God cares for me. What I'm about to say is very important; don't forget this. What I have is not an indication of *how much* God cares for me. The indication of

that is the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross (cf. **I John 4:10**). If I'm breathing today, it is one more reminder there is a Giver in heaven who is blessing me. If I eat today, it is one more reminder there is a Giver in heaven who cares for me. If I have clothes to wear today, it is one more reminder there is a Giver in heaven who cares for me. If I lose sight of the Giver, I'm going to miss out on everything that is truly worth anything as I chase for better gifts. Contentment comes as I focus on the Giver not the gifts.

III. Be God's middle man.

- A. Covetousness is selfishness. I want more and better stuff because it is a score card for me, it proves I'm better than you, and it causes people to look up to me. I may throw lavish parties and even drop some of my overabundance in the coffers of public charities, but it isn't out of generosity; it is because I want to be seen (cf. **Matthew 6:2**). Paul presents a better picture. We are blessed by God in order to bless others. "They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share" (**I Timothy 6:18**, ESV).
- B. In other words, be a middle man. God hasn't blessed you to hoard your blessings in your own bank account. He hasn't blessed you so you can be the life of the party. He hasn't blessed you so you can impress people. He has blessed you to be a pipeline of His blessings in the lives of others. He has blessed you to be hospitable, caring, compassionate, helpful. View yourself as the middle man of God's blessings. He has decided you will be a great manager of His wealth, sharing the good blessing with others. Recognize God sees this even as a kind of worship. In **Hebrews 13:16** God says our sharing is a sacrifice that is pleasing to Him. Covetousness comes as I grasp for more for myself. Contentment comes as I become a middle man for God.

IV. This is not the good life.

- A. Miller Lite once had a commercial tag line: "Life is good." Something would be getting in the way of a guy doing man stuff. He'd get his Miller Lite, slam it on the table, and everything would go the guy's way. The voice over says, "Life is good." About the same time Old Milwaukee put together commercials of some group of guys having a great time doing man stuff like fishing, hunting, tailgating, chasing alligators (or women), it ends with them around a fire enjoying the spoils of their man victories, drinking Old Milwaukee and someone says, "Hey guys, it doesn't get any better than this." And people bought it. Beer would give them the good life. Of course, over the years we've heard about that good life that far too often ends in debt, misery, divorce, and too often death. Doesn't sound so good to me. And we know better than that, right? Yet, how often do we make the same mistake? What is the good life? Having a nice house, driving nice cars, using the latest gizmos and gadgets, talking on the iPhone 11 or the Galaxy S16 (yes, I know those versions aren't out yet, but don't you want one?). Is the good life eating at the finest restaurants, affording annual Disney trips, weekly movies, designer clothes? We chase these things because we think when we get them we'll be able to say, "Life is good," and "It doesn't get any better than this." But this is not the good life.
- B. Paul says we need to store up "treasure for [ourselves] as a good foundation for the future, so that [we] may take hold of that which is truly life" (**I Timothy 6:19**, ESV). There is nothing in this life which is truly life. True life is about what is coming next. And we can't take any of this with us. The ancient Egyptians built huge pyramids and burial chambers to store earthly goods, servants, and even pets to be with their Pharaohs in the after-life. Where is all that stuff? In the burial chambers, or stolen by grave robbers. Oh, don't get me wrong. There is some earthly pleasure that goes along with all that stuff. You can have some good times. For a moment, you may even think all is right with the world. But then the moment passes and you spend the rest of your life chasing it. Why not pursue the truly good life? Why not focus on laying up treasures in heaven and pursuing God? Heaven is forever. Why give up what you can't lose, to chase what you can't keep? Contentment comes as we focus on eternity realizing that down here will never be the good life.

Conclusion:

Why take up this battle to conquer covetousness? Jesus explains in **Matthew 6:24**. "You cannot serve God and money" (ESV). Jesus is not advising us, "You *should not* serve both God and money." He is not commanding us, "You *must not* serve both God and money." He is not encouraging us, "You *really don't want* to serve both God and money." He is stating a fact. "You *cannot* serve both God and money." It's like stealing the Lincoln Memorial. "Not, it shouldn't be done. It can't be done." Money may well be God's greatest competition in our day. But please understand that is exactly what it is. It is competition with God. Paul even calls covetousness idolatry (**Ephesians 5:5**). Money is a tool. We are not better if we have it or worse if we don't. But when we chase it because we think it will provide some security, meaning, or foundation, we simply cannot serve the Lord as well. That is why it is so important to conquer covetousness as Paul did. Invest in The Certainty. Focus on the Giver, not the gifts. Be God's middle-man. Remember this is not the good life. There is great gain in contentment (**I Timothy 6:6**) and contentment comes from these.