

**“Godliness with Contentment Is Great Gain
Thankfulness”
By Chris Ulrich
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Our theme for the month is sound doctrine and, when I first heard that, I thought, “That’s a broad and widely encompassing subject matter,” but, I was talking with Tom yesterday, and there’s probably a hundred different topics that you could incorporate under that header, but, the truth is, it’s not like we’re trying to get into areas that people aren’t really gonna remember; or that aren’t going to be things that you can use day-to-day. We have to know that we can’t ever stray from biblical teaching and think we’re still OK with God. Bob Heitzler preached on the plan of salvation a couple weeks ago and talked about why Jesus’ name is important and used a lot of New Testament scriptures to prove the validity of being born again. That’s something that stays with you; it’s not something that you just get baptized—I like what you shared, Delmy, about the first time you got baptized it didn’t really sink in, but now, you’re realizing that you want to do it and that you want to stick with it. That’s something that’s near and dear to our hearts—to my heart. Parrish delivered the sermon last week about having faith—I have to say that I had never heard the story about how they gave you power over the department, and they had a power outage (I’m laughing *with* you). This was a pretty major thing. For those of you that weren’t here, Parrish works at Baxter out in Round Lake. About five years ago, he was working at a department that does maintenance. Baxter is a huge facility; for those of you who have never seen it, when you drive by there, it’s like its own planet. I kid you not. What happened was, there were a lot of the leaders were out of town, so they were going to get somebody who’s been with the company a long time, like Parrish, so we’re going to give him the reins. The second day that you had the department, you guys had a massive power outage that had the potential to cost the company millions and millions if it wasn’t corrected. At that point, I’m sure he was like, “You’ve got to be kidding me!” Shaking your head, and putting on sackcloth and ashes. I appreciate that message, because, in the end, God got the victory, and it wasn’t like uplifting yourself, it was just a matter of seeking God, and the people around him saw that difference, and I appreciate that. So, we’re going to be talking about this topic this month, sound doctrine, and we’re going to be looking at some verses that pertain to that.

Titus 2:1-8 But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine:...

There’s two verses that really stand out: the first one is, (verse 1) speak thou the things that become sound doctrine. That’s our lifeline. If we’re not speaking sound doctrine, and we’re basically just giving a good speech, or words to no affect... I listened to this guy this past week—I work at Grainger, and we had a sales meeting (which is an annual meeting) and this guy was on point. I mean, he was on point with his subject matter. What I liked it about was (I’m sure he’d rehearsed it to some extent) it wasn’t like he was reading from a script. That, to me, stood out a lot, and he spoke with a degree of passion. There were some things that, if you wanted to nit-pick, you could say, “Well, I found fault with this, and that part he didn’t do correctly,” or whatever, but, overall, I thought he did very well. Ultimately, the sound doctrine part of it, that’s something that we have to have down pat. That’s something that we have to look at from the perspective that we’re in this for the long haul. There is a difference between

knowing the truth of God, being born again, and having the power of God in our lives. The Bible talks about being blown about by every wind of doctrine (Ephesians 4:14). The second verse is (verse 7), showing yourself a pattern of good works; that we're steady, that we're reliable. I remember, just shortly after I got baptized myself, a guy gave a testimony that really stood out quite a bit. He talked about stability. That was something that I personally felt like I needed to hear. It's not like he just decided that was what people needed to hear in advance, it was something that just stood out. It was something that made a big difference. Which brings us to the title of today's message, it's really a two-part message: The first part of the message is, "Godliness with Contentment Is Great Gain," and the second part is, "Being Thankful."

Godliness with Contentment Is Great Gain

I'm going to ask a couple of questions: Are we satisfied and at peace with what God has given us as of right now, right this minute? Or is there always that elusive dream car, that dream house, dream trip, dream romance, chasing the rainbow as they say? It's something you have to ask yourself; we all have to. We go through ups and downs in this life. You've heard the expression, "Well, they've got it made." Well, maybe they do, and maybe they don't. Everybody's going to stand before God. I heard somebody say years ago, "Nobody's getting away with anything." God has an all-seeing eye. We have to have that conviction to lead a life of godliness, to lead a life of holiness; that keeps us on the straight and narrow. Have I been in that boat where I don't feel like I have enough, where I don't feel like I've accomplished enough, where I don't think I'm where I need to be at this juncture in life? Now here's where it gets a little tricky. We should always be striving to improve ourselves in some way, shape, or form. And I mean that both physically and spiritually speaking. Yes, there is a time when you've done all you can do but stand, that is Bible (Ephesians 6:13), but there's also a constant striving. I'm not talking about, "Well, eventually, we'll find the truth;" we've found the truth, but it's just striving towards the perfection of God. Are we perfect? no; the Bible talks about all have sinned and all have fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23) but it also talks about a righteous man falls seven times and rises again (Proverbs 24:16). We have to keep picking ourselves back up, picking ourselves up each day. That doesn't mean we're in a constant state of turmoil or second-guessing ourselves. We should have a confidence, when we've gone through something, along with our efforts to improve, there should also be a healthy balance of satisfaction in our walk with God. We have accomplished some things; we're nearer than when we believed (Romans 13:11), but we have to keep striving.

1 Timothy 6:1-8 ...But godliness with contentment is great gain...

One thing about reading the Bible—I've heard people say, "Well, it's not applicable to me in this day and age; it's not modernized enough." Well, it is if you let it. If you look at the behavior—because that's the one thing about being taught is behavior, the ways of people. It's not about technology. The Bible isn't something where we're going to read about, "In the last days there shall be I-pads and I-phones." We have technology that far surpasses anything from the days of caravans and chariots. There is one Scripture in Daniel where it says that they shall run to and fro and knowledge shall be increased (Daniel 12:4). We've seen that in exponential ways. You just look at from the Industrial Revolution until now; some of the advances in

technology are just mind-boggling. I'm not impressed by it like I'm impressed by God. Somebody said recently, "Let God impress you."

I'd like to spend some time on those last 3 verses because this is sound doctrine. You know there's nothing wrong with having nice things in this world (we all have to have a standard of living) and I like nice things like anyone else. Also, there's nothing wrong with self-improvement, if you have the ability to get a higher education, a better job, a better house, do what you can within reason. I'm not asking them where I work to cut my pay, or to let me work more hours for less pay. Every year they give us an increase, and I look at it like, "I want twenty percent." That doesn't happen. I will say that I've been fortunate. I thank God for that. I'm not asking to pay more for my home mortgage or for higher property taxes, although they'll do that without asking. Getting to the balance of those nice things, Luke 12 that our life consists not in the abundance of the things we possess (Luke 12:15). So what does our perspective need to be? My goal here is to encourage and uplift, not to put anybody on a guilt trip. It's not about you've got this type of car; you've got this type of house; you go on these types of trips... The Bible tells us a lot of things about riches, but that's not the meaning of the message today. I will say this, in Philippians it talks about whatsoever state we are, to therewith be content (Philippians 4:11). You might be just getting out of high school, you might be just getting out of the Navy, you might be in retirement, or somewhere in between. We're all at various stages of our life. We're going to accumulate some things, but, ultimately, we have to look at it like, "Am I accumulating those riches in God?" that's what going to ultimately matter in eternity.

Now I'm going to transition to the second part of the message.

Being Thankful

I think being honest with ourselves we really have to look at the toll this economic crisis has taken on everybody. I'm talking about first and foremost to individuals, the houses we live in, the companies we work for including those who are self-employed, but it's also taken a toll on church organizations. None of us have been immune from this downturn. Oh, I'm not saying there aren't glimpses of a turn around, some pockets of improvements, a rebounding stock market for what it's worth. Pastor Paine said something earlier this year, he said that at the State of the Church address he asked the question how many people were making less money now than in 2006, and he said that more than half the people raised their hands. That really stuck with me, because, you might have somebody that's prosperous, and you might have somebody right next to you that's really been affected. I left Grainger in 2006, and I took a job in Milwaukee for a short time. I had worked for Grainger for eight years, and willfully left to work for this other company. Forty-eight days into it, he comes to me on a Monday morning and says, "It's not working out." That was not a comfortable next couple of months. Just prior to that happening—I know this is for me; we've heard this saying, "This is for somebody," and I hope I is, I hope it's encouraging—but I know that, just prior to that happening, I remember (How many believe God speaks to them? I'm not talking about the way that the media portrays it, like, oh, a visible God speaks? They portray Christians as though we actually believe that there's a God standing there (or wherever)... Yes, I do; I believe in an unseen power. We can just look at some of the examples: electricity, nuclear power, wind; unseen power that are parables or analogies of God's power. That's proof to me) God spoke to me and said, "You have a lot more things to be thankful for than things to worry about." And then a couple of days later... I

remember writing it down in this little book that I have, and I remember it coming back to me, and, you know what? I believe that it was something that God was preparing me for.

There are signs of economic turnaround. There are also a lot of doomsayers, “If we keep going at this rate...” Okay, I’m here to say that whether it gets a whole lot better or a whole lot worse or maybe even just stays about the same, I know one thing for sure, we still have a lot to be thankful for. That’s not always easy; let’s face it, it’s easy to be thankful when everything is just cruising along, everything is copacetic. You get that curveball, you get that different pass defense, or whatever way you want to look at it, and it changes things up. You have to shift gears and get into a different mode. Have you ever come across unthankful, ungrateful, unhappy people in this world? There’s a lot of them. It’s unfortunate that we do but we do. And being thankful isn’t the kind of behavior that can be forced on anybody.

I will ask this question: what do we do if we feel a root of bitterness taking hold in our life? It’d be easy for me to say, just pray it through, just read the Bible, or just pay a good deed forward. I’m not saying that those things aren’t going to work; there are different ways of getting it out. The Bible talks about in Hebrews about those having a root of bitterness whereby many may be defiled—and that’s talking to *the church*; that’s talking to *us*. It’s one of those things where, have I ever seen it growing? You know what? If things especially seem to be worsening, overall, as far as economically speaking, or maybe you’re just getting older, or you’re not as close to your family... whatever the case might be where our emotion is deteriorating or declining. That kind of a thing, we have to be able to identify it. What’s bothering us right now? Is it someone, or something, an event from our past, or concern about our future? Who here worries about the future? I mean, worry in the sense of—I know Pastor Wilson, one of our other pastors, has talked in years past about worry is not of God—okay, I agree with that, and it tries to attach itself to us a lot of times because we’re trying to plan. We’ve got to have a plan. I’ve said this before, if Christ doesn’t come back in our lifetime—I know that, if you’re new to the faith, you think, “Christ is coming back; the end is near!” and you think that you might be taken that day, or the next day, but then, it’s months go by, years, five years, ten years... and then it becomes, “I’m going to live my life as though He’s not coming back in my lifetime, but plan as if He’s coming back to day.” If He doesn’t, I’m going to be ready, but if He does, I’m still going to be ready. We all have things that weigh us down, some things may seem trivial, other things may be so painful to us that it’s hard to even know where to begin—there’s tragedy. There’s events like in Boston, where people are hurt—it does affect us, and it is emotional, and whether it’s a root of bitterness, or it’s a wrong-doing that we’ve suffered, or whatever the case might be, and you know what? Knowing it doesn’t necessarily mean the pain is going to suddenly disappear. But then we know where to begin and can use the power God will give us to get rid of it, to get over it, to move on, because one thing is for sure, a root of bitterness will keep us from being thankful, it will continually gnaw at us.

Sometimes we will fight battles that we don’t even think that we should have to fight. I’ve talked to people that said, “How could this happen? How could this be?” It’s so blown out of proportion, and lawmakers will make a law, and then it’s like, this is overly frustrating and you want to take action and find a good place to start...

Colossians 3:12-17 ...whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

On the opposite end of the scale (as opposed to the anger or the bitterness or whatever), what do you feel you have to be thankful to God for? This day, this week, this month, this year, the air to breathe, a place to live, food to eat. An ability to read, an ability to reason, and an ability to pray and seek God. A tender heart, and a love for God and people. Oh, and by the way, there is that promise of eternal life, which, Tom and I were talking about it last week, and if you picked a hundred people at random, and asked them, made it multiple choice and gave them, say, ten options, what would they pick? Maybe one would be the best job, a nice car, a big house, the most beautiful wife (or handsome husband), a million dollar mansion... How many know that, without a shadow of a doubt, *everybody* would pick eternal life? Now, I could be wrong. We could go to the Gallop Poll people and find out for sure... So, what do we have to be thankful for? There's a lot of times unexpected blessings that come along the way, and things that just... I'll give you a quick example, and this was just about a month ago, the apartment building that I'm part owner with—every month, we pay the mortgage, we've been very diligent with that. For nine years, I've been doing that. Here's the interesting part: I filled out the check, filled out the form, and was getting ready to mail it back to Citimortgage. This was a couple of weeks ago, towards the end of March. I stuck it in my back pocket, and I was going to run up and just drop it off in the mailbox. I got to doing some other things, and normally I'm not this careless, and, somehow I wind up over at Home Depot doing something else after running a couple of other errands, and, "Oh, my gosh, I didn't mail that check!" Now it's been through lot of different places, and it's very possible, if it had slipped out... Yes, there are safeguards if I had lost it, I could go and cancel the check and call Citimortgage and on and on... But it was right there. I feel like I'm one of those that errs on the side of being a little more cautious when it comes to those kinds of finances. I thank God for that. I don't recommend being careless with your mortgage payment; I'd say be careful with that. I had one just last night planning a trip in early June, and I made a hotel reservation at a place in New Mexico. For some reason, I woke up this morning, about 2:30 in the morning, with the thought, "Just check your E-mail right quick." I can check my E-mail on my phone. I looked at it, and it was the wrong date. So I called them, and explained the problem, and they fixed it, but, nothing showed me that. I believe that was God. That may be a small thing, but if I had gotten there, and they didn't have my reservation, and there were no more rooms available... Those are the kind of things that I'm talking about that are very specific as far as being thankful to God. The list is really endless if we think about it and I know that it may vary from person to person depending on your circumstances, but this is the kind of attitude that keeps us in the race.

Romans 8:24-28 ...all things work together for good to them that love God...

So, that last verse: All things work together for good to them that love God. That's something that stuck with me for a long time. There've been moments where I just didn't believe it. God is quick to remind me, "It's My Word." It's not a forceful thing; it didn't knock me off the chair—He could—here's what I'm saying: it's something to put in your toolbox; it's something to remember: All things work together for good to them that love God.

It's not wrong to have a plan to our life and to hope our plans go well and even better than what we planned. We Christians aren't gluttons for punishment trying to always do things the hard way or living in some kind of desperation constantly. I must confess there have been times when things got rougher and more beyond my control that, again, I didn't feel like all things worked together for good for me. Being truly thankful means feeling that way even when

things aren't going our way, or aren't going the way we'd planned, or when things aren't in our complete control, as we might think that they would be. It doesn't mean that we have to be thankful for everything no matter what. I'm not thankful about what happened in Boston. I'm not thankful about a disease or a tragedy. We pray to God for the understanding and the ability to cope with it, to be able to put it in the right perspective. Ultimately, God saved our soul, and, yes, tragedy can strike at any time; if I'm ready, then I'm ready, and I have to be thankful for that. That's the big difference-maker. I believe that there are a lot of people that do blame God for whatever goes wrong. It's becoming a more and more prominent viewpoint. Not just in the media, either, I met a guy that said, "I blame God," and I'm thinking, "For what?" This is a co-worker's brother's friend that lives in one of the nice high-rises in Chicago... If that's dug down deep in your life and you blame God. I had a real good discussion with that guy, and I'm not talking about beating him over the head with the Bible or forcing him to convert. You've got to take that and resolve that between you and God. If you think you've got something to blame God for, well, I just don't buy into that. I'm not a glutton for punishment; I'm not saying, "Bring it on!" to all the tragedy or hardship. That's not the case.

In closing, I'd like to point out that God's blessings are infinite, but, ultimately, we're the ones who decide individually that we're going to be thankful or not. If we remain thankful, we'll never go wrong.

