

The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

Christians and Money

Hebrews 13:5-6

5 Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU," 6 so that we confidently say, "THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?"

**Lord, give us the meaning and spirit of Your Word while it lies open before us;
Apply Your Word with power to our souls, threatening or promise, doctrine or precept,
whatever it may be; lead us with trembling and with joy into the soul and marrow of Your Word.
(adapted from C.H. Spurgeon)**

One day, Abraham Lincoln was walking down the street with two small boys who were crying loudly. A neighbor passing by inquired, "What's the matter, Abe? Why all the fuss?" Lincoln responded, "The trouble with these lads is what's wrong with the world; one has a nut and the other wants it!"

Oh that it was only nuts that we crave! I'm sure you are more than aware that the basic mindset of our society is materialist. We are a people who want. And once we get, we want more. As believers in Jesus Christ, we are daily faced with the temptation to want more than we have.

If I were to ask you, could you tell me what is the last of the Ten Commandments? It might do us well to note that the last commandment of the Decalogue is simply, "do not covet" – "do not inappropriately desire that which you do not have." This might be a bit of personal speculation, but seeing that this is the last of the Ten Commandments may indicate just how pervasive this sin is – that all evil actions flow first from evil attitudes and coveting is first and foremost a desire (and evil desire) of the heart. And while that commandment was given in the context of a simpler lifestyle, it is easy to see its application and importance for us today. For all around us we are bombarded with the temptations to covet, to want more than what we need, and to complain about what we have or don't have.

As we come to Hebrews 13:5-6 we are presented with yet another Christian behavior that is to flow out of living our lives by faith in the person, promise and provision of God and that behavior has to do with how we think about money, material things, contentment and confidence in God. And so, this morning I would speak to you concerning three attitudes addressed in our text:

- I. The attitude of covetousness (13:5a)
- II. The attitude of contentment (13:5b)
- III. The attitude of confidence (13:6)

Let us now then turn our attention to the text...

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I. The attitude of covetousness (13:5a)

Make sure that your character is free from the love of money...

Our text begins with a negative – [read text] – this is a warning against one of the most vile of sins that finds its way even into the heart of the most consecrated of saints and that is the sin of covetousness. We read this exhortation, “Make sure that your character – that is, your lifestyle, your behavior, your very attitude – is free, that is without and not characterized by the love of money.”

That phrase, “**the love of money**” is very much connected with the previous exhortations in this chapter that have called us specifically to love the brethren (v. 1), to love strangers (v. 2) and implicitly to love the afflicted (v.3) and to love marriage (v. 4). The call here is literally – “**without a love for silver**” and came to be used to speak of those who inappropriately longed for things they either did not or could not have; in other words – this is a call not to be covetous. The NKJV states it this way saying, “**Let your conduct be without covetousness...**”

As we will see in a moment, the positive command in the next part of the verse calls us to be content. And so, as we seek to determine just exactly what covetousness is; what is meant by this phrase, “**the love of money**” – we learn that it is discontentedness; a being unsatisfied [unsatisfied with a variety of things] with your circumstances and surroundings and ultimately it then is impugning the very goodness of God [we are failing to recognize and praise God from whom all blessings flow].

Covetousness has been said to be to theft what anger is to murder and lust to adultery. It is the seed, it is the starting point, it is the disposition of the heart and mind that, if left unchecked and allowed to fester, will erupt into sinful actions. Beloved, covetousness, sometimes spoken of as greed, according to Colossians 3:5, and is called idolatry, meaning that when I want something or someone so badly that it pre-occupies my thoughts and negatively affects my behavior, I have not only sinned against others, but I have sinned against God. For idolatry is the placing of something or someone other than God in the place of primacy in your heart and mind. In other words, God takes a back seat as your focus, your energies and your service become devoted to obtaining this “other” thing to the neglect of a right heart, focus and service to God and the things of God.

What are some ways then we might identify whether or not this sin of covetousness is taking hold in our lives? Consider these markers of covetousness.

1. If you are neglecting biblical priorities, ignoring the Lord and His will, His leading and His provisions; and if you disregarding your daily responsibility to pursue heavenly treasures, then covetousness is invading your heart.
2. If you consistently find yourself unhappy, miserable, angry, bitter, envious, jealous or critical of others who have something you want, then covetousness has gripped your heart.
3. If you see yourself going to unreasonable and/or unbiblical limits and extremes to get what you want, including manipulation, lying, stealing, physical force, even going into debt beyond your ability to repay, then your heart has been seized with covetousness.

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So it does not matter whether it is a little boy who so covets the cookie his mother told him he could not have until after dinner so that he steals it out of the jar, or if it is a woman who so covets the looks of another woman that she ignores, avoids or despises that other woman, or if it is a couple who so longs for latest model car or entertainment center or home that they strap themselves financially, or the man who lusts after another woman that he commits adultery with her be it inwardly or outwardly, or the person who is so consumed by the details of life, the pursuit of money, position, power or possessions, that he neglects his privileges and responsibilities to God and to God's people – all such actions and more reveal in the heart the attitude of covetousness.

And beloved, it is all around us. If you have not seen it – it is only because you have put on blinders. Modern advertising preys, plays and promotes a covetous spirit – a wanting of more; an advancing of discontentment with what you have in exchange for a lusting after that which you have not.

And the simple, yet profound exhortation of our text here in Hebrews 13:5 is this; *the faithful do not allow a covetous spirit to flourish in their hearts [pause]*. Believers in Jesus Christ are not consumed with a love for that which money can secure. The children of God do not focus on what they do not have, but, as we will see in the next part of our verse, they will focus on that which God has provided them. So then, in light of all this, might it be said by others that your life, your character, your actions, attitudes and behavior reflect a “I want what I do not have” mentality or does it reflect a “I have all that I need by the grace of Jesus” mentality?” And more importantly, instead of asking what other might say, how do you suppose God would answer that question on your behalf? Beloved, ***“make sure that your character is free from the love of money.”***

II. The attitude of contentment (13:5b)

...being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, “I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU”...

So then, what is the answer or remedy to the attitudes and actions of covetousness? I am so grateful that our text gives us just such an answer stating that the remedy to the attitude of covetousness is developing the attitude of contentment. We read [read text]. Here we find both the remedy to the problem of covetousness – that is being content - as well as a reason we can and must be content.

First, consider the remedy. Our text says, ***“being content with what you have.”*** [pause – repeat] The call here literally means, “allowing yourself to be content or satisfied with what you have.” It is interesting that being content is not placed here as something we can actively pursue, but rather it is something that is done to and through us. If we actively pursue contentment, we usually end up being covetous. Rather then, the call is to allow contentment to be placed in us by the power and provision of God. In other words, we are to be satisfied with what God brings to us.

I am mindful of that scene we looked at last week in Genesis 2. God brought before Adam all the creatures He had made while Adam named them. Through the course of that exercise, Adam realized that there was no one like him, no one suitable for him. Nowhere however does it say that Adam complained. But God did make a provision for him, forming

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Eve from Adam's side and Adam's response was that of great satisfaction. After the creation of Eve, Adam knew that he was complete – he was content.

To be content means here speaks of a satisfaction of the mind concerning the sufficiency and fitness of one's present condition. For the Christian it is saying, "since I trust in God and since I have believed in what Jesus accomplished for me on the cross and by His resurrection from the grave in the securing for me of eternal life, whatever material things I have or do not have are unimportant and inconsequential to me." To be content with what we have materially, as given here in our text, is in essence the believer's response to the gospel of Jesus Christ. If God, in Jesus, has freely given us eternal life as well as all things, then why should I worry; why should I fret, why would I wrongly desire more? This does not mean that I do not seek to provide myself or my family with what is necessary for life. It does not mean that it is inappropriate to have an abundance if God so provides; nor does it mean that I am somehow faithless if I seem to be in want. But as the Apostle Paul so aptly stated in Philippians 4:11, "***I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.***" And beloved, what does it mean to be content in whatever circumstances one finds himself? What does it mean to be satisfied with little or with much? Don't forget what Paul just exhorted the Philippians earlier in chapter 4 saying in verse 4, "***Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.***" Rejoice in your little. Rejoice in your much. *You cannot rejoice in the Lord and be discontent at the same time.* You cannot rest content in the Lord and be covetous at the same time. The remedy for covetousness is allowing yourself to be content in God.

And then we are given a reason for this contentment as we read those words, "***for He Himself has said, 'I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you.'***" If we ask ourselves, "How is it that we can be content, even if circumstances or provisions seem dire?" Here we are given the promise of God who has, according to our text, said this to every believer in Christ. It is interesting to note that there is not one specific OT text upon which this verse is based, but that it seems to be more of a summary of God's promise to be with His people. In Deuteronomy 31:6, and 8, Moses reminds Israel and Joshua that the Lord will not fail or forsake them.

Deuteronomy 31:6, 8

6 Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the Lord your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. 8 The Lord is the one who goes ahead of you; He will be with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.

In Joshua 1:5, the Lord Himself speaks to Joshua and tells him that He will not fail or forsake him.

No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you.

And in 1 Chronicles 28:20, David reminds his son Solomon of this same truth saying,

20...Be strong and courageous, and act; do not fear nor be dismayed, for the Lord God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you nor forsake you until all the work for the service of the house of the Lord is finished.

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Now then, our Hebrews text seems to summarize all these thoughts. But it does so in a dramatic fashion. We have two phrases here meant to be reasons why we should not be covetous and why we can be content. First is the statement that says, “**I will not desert you...**” In the Greek this is stated with a double negative making it literally read, “I will not, no will not desert you.” Remember that in the Scriptures, if a speaker or author really wanted to press his point, he would state his point twice. That is why Jesus would say some 25 times in the Gospel of John, “**Truly, truly I say to you...**” – to emphasize what He was about to say. So, we are to read Hebrews 13:5 as saying “I will not, no will not desert you.” The word “desert” does not simply mean “to leave or depart” but more specifically “to cease from sustaining or upholding.” We can be content with what we have and not covet because God doubly promises never to cease sustaining us. He will always provide what we need. And even if it seems our physical needs are not met, we know that we were not meant to remain in this life and in this body, but are meant and promised eternal life and provision.

But the text is not content with this double assurance and does something extraordinary. For the final phrase of Hebrews 13:5 includes not a double emphasis, but rather a triple emphasis, literally reading, “I will not, no will not, no will not ever forsake you.” The only other time we see such a triple emphasis on a text is in the declaration of God as being holy – as Isaiah 6:3 says,

Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts (repeated in Revelation 4:8)

Such a threefold emphasis is meant to provide believers a triple assurance of the truth – God does not forsake His children. This word “forsake” is rich and carries the idea of abandoning, leaving in dire straits, leaving someone in a helpless or hostile circumstance. Why is it that we can be content with whatever we have, be it little or much? Because we know that whatever our circumstance, our God has not left us helpless; He has not and will not abandon us eternally – and more often than not, when we consider what we do have, we realize that God has not abandoned us in present. The promise of God here is that our God will come to our rescue when we find ourselves in difficult circumstances – so then, let us be content – allow yourself to be content with these thoughts. Do not trust in riches and wealth to bring you happiness and contentment, but rather be content with what you have. And what do you have? If you are in Christ, if you have called upon Him as Savior and Lord, if you are trusting in His provisions and living according to His teachings, then you must know you have the person and promise of God. Allow yourself to be content with this.

III. The attitude of confidence (13:6)

...so that we confidently say, “**THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?**”

So, we are not to be covetous but rather content with what we have knowing the person and promise of God. But again we note that there is more. Our final point found in Hebrews 13:6 is that the believer is to have the attitude of confidence. For we read [read text].

This text reminds us from the beginning that because we do not trust in things but rather are content with God and what He provides, we can and must have a confidence, a boldness, literally a determination to exercise courage and make a remarkable declaration. Here the author quotes from Psalm 118:6 which says,

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The Lord is for me; I will not fear; what can man do to me?

How is it that we can be confident, content and not covetous? Because we know the Lord is our helper, or as it says in Psalm 118, “the Lord is for me.” He has my best interests and His glory in mind. In other words then, we are to know that the Lord outweighs any dangers or circumstances in our lives. The Lord is on our side. We stand in the presence of the Lord as believers and being in the presence of the Lord is more valuable to us than all the possessions this life could offer.

Stop and consider for a moment what it means to have the Lord as your helper; what it means that the Lord is for you; what it means to be in His presence. [pause] According to Psalm 27:1-3, the presence of the Lord in one’s life is salvation:

Psalm 27:1-3

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the defense of my life; whom shall I dread? 2 When evildoers came upon me to devour my flesh, my adversaries and my enemies, they stumbled and fell. 3 Though a host encamp against me, my heart will not fear; Though war arise against me, in spite of this I shall be confident.

Additionally, to be in the presence of the Lord, knowing that the Lord is for you means to have the joy and eternal pleasures of God as we note from Psalm 16:11 reading,

You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.

Beloved, do you know that the Lord is for you? Are you afraid, afraid of circumstances, afraid of not having things, afraid of others, what they might think of you or do to you? In the Greek, Hebrews 13:6 begins with the word Lord and ends with the word man. The Lord is first and man is last. The Lord is to be preeminent and man, in contrast pales in comparison. Do you have such a confidence in the Lord? Do you really trust Him for all your needs? Beloved, you cannot express confidence in God and worry at the same time. We need to learn how to confidently say, “The Lord is my helper, the Lord is for me – what can concern me, what can man do to me. Lord, help me live boldly for You.”

Is this not the very essence of the argument in Romans 8:31-39? After recounting the blessings of living by the Spirit of God, what do we read?

31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? 33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. 35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED

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AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Is this truly your confidence? Is there anything else you truly need beyond this? Do you trust your God to provide you with what you need to live and glorify Him? Let me close by reading to you what Jesus said is the cure for worry, for fear, for a lack of confidence and contentment. We read this in Matthew 6:25-34

25 For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? 27 And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? 28 And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, 29 yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! 31 Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' 32 For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. 34 So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Beloved, let us be wary of the attitude of covetousness; that attitude that wants just a little more; that plots for things of this world rather than pursues the things of God. Let us know that to covet is likened with the sin of adultery and fornication as we noted in Hebrews 13:4. And let us combat the attitude of covetousness with allowing ourselves to be content with what God has given us and being confident in what the Lord has done for us, being for us, granting us salvation and giving us a hope.

Soli Deo Gloria

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