

BE CONTENT WITH WHAT YOU HAVE
HEBREWS 13:5-6

INTRODUCTION:

G. W. Jones in his book, The Innovator and other Modern Parables, tells about Eddie.

When Eddie was five he stood in the front yard and watched the big boys walking to school. "When I get to be six I will go to school, and it will be very nice," he said to himself. But when Eddie got to be six and did go to school, it wasn't all that nice.

"When I go to high school, it will be great," Eddie said, dreaming of being a football star, driving his own car, and having big muscles under his sweater. But when Eddie did go to high school, things didn't work out as planned.

"When I get out of this dumb place" he said with disgust, "I'm going to the university, where they treat you like an adult. It won't be boring, and the girls are too mature to care whether or not you are football star." But the university didn't quiet work out the way Ed planned either.

"Well," he said, "Life is really going to begin when I graduate, get a job, and have my own apartment." But life didn't seem to get started too well, even when Ed found a pretty good job and had a much too expensive apartment all to himself.

"I'm so lonely," he said. "That is what is wrong. Just about everything that is wrong with my life would be solved if I had a good wife." Marriage didn't solve a lot of Ed's problems, but it created a few more - like money problems, for instance.

Several promotions later, with a bigger income swallowed by bigger bills, and bigger psychological pressures waking him up at night, Ed thought, "Life will really be wonderful when I retire. I will still be relatively young and I can fish, hunt, be free of responsibilities." Edward finally retired. He was out in his new boat, sliding along the water to a secluded fishing hole when he thought, "All my life I've been looking for happiness and contentment. When I get use to this retirement way of life, I think it is finally going to be great."

Of course, by now he didn't really believe that which is why he added, (to assure himself), "Now, for the first time, I feel that life - real living - is just around the corner!

Within minutes, a searing pain ripped through his chest, and Edward turned that corner, his last, where he dropped the whole matter.

Ed's problem is the problem with many adults. They have an itch for more that drives them through their whole lifetime. Being driven by that itch for more they miss what life is all about. Such persons are particularly poor risks for the building of a home that will last a lifetime.

The letter to the Hebrews addresses Ed's problem and the problem of many men and women in our society. It gives us the admonition, "be content with what you have."

When you look at these revealing words from the inspired writer, two great truths about building a life and a family that will last a lifetime spring from the page. If you are ever going to have such a home, you will have to find contentment, contentment with what you have.

I. BECAUSE IT WILL PREVENT COVETOUSNESS.

In the context in which he has addressed marriage, the writer admonishes: "Keep your lives free from the love of money." "Love of money" translates a word that is commonly translated "covetousness." The word is appropriately translated, "love of money." It means to be greedy, to want more money. It is the opposite of being satisfied with what you have. It is the opposite of contentment! You will never find contentment and covetousness in the same heart—or in the same home.

Those of us who have spent much of our lives counseling couples, who are struggling with their marriages, know that "love of money" is a major obstacle in the building of a home that will last. It is not usually given that particular title. It is more likely to be labeled simply, "financial problems." But at the heart of those "financial problems" what you really have is a couple that is not content with what they have. Their itch to have more creates all kinds of spiritual and relational problems in their lives. Greed never produces happy lives--or happy marriages.

1. Covetousness makes a god out of money and things.

In his letter to the Colossian Church the apostle has this revealing word: "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed which is idolatry" (Col. 3:5)." Greed is a different Greek word from the one translated, "love of money," but it has the same basic force. In both cases it is an inordinate desire and passion for earthly things. It is just a broader word that would encompass the love for money. The apostle also directly declares that such love for money is actually idolatry. It is making a god out of money and things. It is placing expectations upon money and things that should appropriately be placed only on God. It is trusting money and things to do something that only God can do. It is seeking for more things with the passion you should be seeking a better relationship with God.

You should be able to see where covetousness is leading! If covetousness and greed are idolatries, then it means that such a person has excluded from their lives the true and the living God. There will always be something missing in the life of a person who is bowing before and trusting in a false god. There will never be a happy companion with which to share a life. It is covetousness that robs so many young couples of the inner happiness that they need. The only way they will overcome covetousness is to become content with what they have.

2. Covetousness breeds dissatisfaction.

Someone has described covetousness as being like drinking salt water. It will never, never quench your thirst.

We can see evidences of this all around us. You know couples, in fact, you may be involved in this yourself, who think if they could make one more move upward in the size of the house that they live in, it would solve all their problems. It is interesting to see what has happened in our culture across the past generation. Since I have lived through most of these years, it is rather easy to have a perspective on it. For instance, in 1975, only 46% of the new single-family homes built had central air-conditioning. In 1995, it had risen to 80%. In 1975, only 20% of the homes had two and a half or more bathrooms. In 1995, almost half - 48% have two bathrooms. In 1975, only 21% of the new homes had four or more bathrooms, but in '95 it was up to 30%. In 1975, only 53% had a garage for two or more cars, but in 1995 it is 76%. The average size of a home over this period of time has grown from 1,645 sq. ft. to 2,095 sq. ft. Does all of this mean we have moved to a new level of marital happiness and fulfillment in America? Has living in bigger houses with more luxuries and more garages brought greater happiness? Has it helped having more bathrooms? You know the answer. There is still a restlessness in the human spirit and so many know they will find contentment if they can only move to one size larger. It never works. Covetousness breeds dissatisfaction. Actually while the size of our houses has grown remarkably, the rate of divorce has been skyrocketing.

3. Covetousness destroys relationships.

When a couple is infected with a love for money, you can depend upon it that there will be severe pressure upon their relationship as husband and wife. Their love for money and their trust in money will feed selfishness. It will lead to arguments over what they do with

their money since it is so important. It will lead to bad decisions in their attempt to get more money since they love it so much. In many cases it will lead the woman to forsake the home for a job in the market place since it is money that will bring happiness. The mother\wife getting a job outside of the home is a step toward marital disaster in many cases. It will cause the man to invest more and more of himself in his career, and maybe even take another job on the side. The casualty so often in their drive to get more is the relationship with their marriage partner and children.

4. Covetousness forfeits the favor of God.

Actually, the apostle Paul stated it stronger than this in the Colossian letter. He indicated that the wrath of God comes upon persons who commit themselves to a covetous lifestyle. How in the world do you expect to build a home that is going to last if you start out with the disfavor of God upon the relationship? If you are worshipping at the altar of mammon, how do you ever expect the God of heaven to grant peace and joy in your relationship? The price for the things we seek is far too high.

You can see the truth that this text puts before us. It is so applicable in the home and family relationship. You need to learn to be content with what you have because it will prevent destructive covetousness from finding a place in your heart and in your life.

But, how can you become content with what you have? The writer of Hebrews gives some wise counsel. You do it by faith. Faith in the living God!

II. BY LIVING BY FAITH.

The alternative to covetousness is living by faith. The secret of a contented heart is living by faith. It is faith in the living God that will enable you to be content with what you have. In our text, the writer of Hebrews says, "Because God has said " - then he proceeds to quote an Old Testament promise. After quoting the promise he writes, "So we say with confidence - " This is a description of faith in action. The person of faith hears what God says and responds to what God says with her own declaration. Nothing is more important than building a home that will last a lifetime than personal faith in the living God. This passage points us to the kind of faith that will insure your family and its survival in the times of the storm.

1. Faith relies on the promises of God.

Faith is concerned about who God is and what God has said. When faith looks upon a circumstance, it asks the question, "What has God promised to do about a circumstance like this?" The writer of Hebrews points back to something that God has said that can be an encouragement in so many circumstances. "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." Actually, there is not a passage in the Old Testament where God said exactly this, at least not in just one verse. However, he said this when you put together two or three verses from the Old Testament. The inspired writer made this inspired combination and came up with this promise from the Lord -- and what a promise it is!

"Never will I leave you" — this is as strong a statement as you can put into words. It does something that we would not do in English when you look at the original text. It uses double negatives. Dr. Hobbs translates it like this: "Not never will I abandon; neither

not never you I will forsake." That does not make good English but it did make a strong statement in the Greek text. It was the inspired way of saying, "Under no circumstances at any time will I ever leave you or forsake you." While the two words "leave" and "forsake" can be seen as synonyms, they do have their own particular contribution to make. "Leave" means to give up, to abandon, to desert, and to lose, to cease from. Dr. Maclaren says it means, "to withdraw the hand that sustains." Is this not a good word? God is saying that he will never withdraw the hand that sustains. Did you catch it? This is what the God who cannot lie says!

The word translated "forsake" means to leave behind. It means to desert, to drop, and to withdraw what is needed. God is saying that He will be there for you and with you in every circumstance that life may bring. Can you not imagine the peace that this can bring to a family circle if they really believe that God is with them in every circumstance?

What a joy it is when a family learns that God is with them. He can do for them what money and things could never do. They respond to every circumstance by relying upon a promise of God.

2. Faith confesses the Lord as a helper.

You hear then the response of faith in the confession it makes—"The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"

What a cheerful, courageous, confident declaration—"The Lord is my helper!" The Lord is the Almighty God, the Maker of heaven and earth. He is the owner of all things, and

the One in charge of the universe—and He is my helper. A helper is one who comes to your aid when you call. He is the one you can depend on to meet your need when all of your resources have been expended.

My wife has gotten a lot mileage out of a family experience that came to us when our children were still strong. We had allowed our finances to get out of control—it is easy to do this when you have children—we have four. One way to address such a problem is to make a sincere commitment to live within your income—to not charge anything. On behalf of our family, I made such a commitment for the family. I declared that we would not use credit cards anymore; we would look to the Lord for whatever need we might have. As I look back on it, I can now see that this was easier for me than for Alice. She is the one who dealt with most of the daily needs of the family—money for food, money for clothing, money for the essentials of the home. Most of the money I spent was less essential to the welfare of the family.

My announcement came at a rather untimely moment. It was still several days to payday, and food closet was pretty bare. Just after I made this declaration, one of our deacons who worked for the railroad came up to me after the morning worship service. He asked, “Pastor, does you family like steak?” I assured him that to be best of my memory we did. It had been a while since we had enjoyed any steak. He said, “I will be by this afternoon to bring you some steak. One of the railroad cars was derailed, and it was full of beef, and I was able to get some of it. I want to share some with you.”

Did he ever! He brought arms full of beef. Hamburger—which we were familiar with; roasts; steaks of all types—piles of it. We had never seen so much good beef in all our lives.

When Alice served the family some of the steak, our oldest son interrupted his enjoyment of the steak to observe, “Mother, I believe that we eat better when God provides than when Daddy provides, don’t you?” He did not get any disagreement at our table.

What would happen if you declared, “The Lord is my helper!” and then when your family has a financial problem you took it to the Lord. You waited on Him to meet the need.

You did not use the credit card—but waited on the Lord. You gave the Lord an opportunity to demonstrate to you that you can live without the thing that you think you need, or an opportunity to meet the need—if He determines it to be a real need.

The reference to the evil that men can do to you was in the context of persecution. There were often financial consequences for following Jesus as a disciple. How many of your fears have to do with money? Are you afraid of losing your job, or maybe afraid of losing your health, and not being able to support your family? Be confident—as long as you do not lose your Helper, you are safe. He is fully able to meet all of your needs.

What would happen if you started praying about your finances—instead of arguing about them? What would happen if you stopped fretting and started trusting? What would happen if you began to see God as your helper in all of life? My guess is that you would find inner contentment.

The admonition is clear—Be content with what you have. It is a command. Obedience to this command will build a good foundation under your life and your home.

