

But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. I Tim. 6:8

Sometimes the setback that frustrate us the most or seem to be the hardest burdens to bear only really affect the frills of life. Not always, but sometimes. We might be able to endure major heartbreak like the loss of loved ones, broken families, loneliness, physical injury and disability with Christian forbearance. But when it comes to not getting what we want in terms of a new job, house, or car, or even just nice clothes we can easily become discontented. Plain old life is a glorious gift, and we do well to remember that when we don't get all the trimmings and trappings that we would like.

St. Paul was writing to Timothy about being a pastor whose trains the hearers by living his message. It is important for a pastor to earn a living, but just as important not to become greedy or to model materialistic, worldly ambition. Christians should find their contentment in what really matters. As Jesus told us in the Sermon on the Mount, God knows you need the necessities (obviously; that's why they're called necessities) and He will not forget to give them to you. That free us up to focus on what really matters, the things of eternity, love, and service. Unfortunately, we often use the opportunity to focus on what doesn't matter, i.e. more and more material things and comforts.

There is nothing wrong with nice things; they're a gift of God for which we thank Him. But when we endure material setbacks, which can also come from God for our good, we must remember to be content with the necessities. We don't choose a bare bones life, but we accept it as enough and give thanks for what when that is what we receive. That distinction between wants and needs is always important.

Congregations face the same distinction. We have wants and needs. There is nothing wrong with having nice aspects of church life that aren't necessities—stained glass, church bells, candles, etc. Those are good gifts for which we ought to be grateful. But they aren't necessities. They're a bonus, an ad-on, something that makes our life together better, but also something we could live together without if we had to. We shouldn't be embarrassed to pursue such good things as long we remember the real focus is on the spiritual needs of people.

Spiritual needs are just like physical needs. Food and clothing. When we focus on Word and Sacrament, we focus on the bread of life and robe of Christ's righteousness which we wear by faith. Those are the spiritual necessities. And those are the things God will always continue to provide for you. Preaching and teaching focused on Christ and baptism and Holy Communion within a community of prayer and praise. Those are necessities. If we have those things, we can be content. In this time of pandemic church life has not always been what we like. We've done without a lot of the comforts. But we've never been bereft of the food and clothing of eternal life.

Only by first and foremost being content with and giving thanks for the necessities should we seek to make the setting of those gifts as beautiful, accessible, and enjoyable as possible. We ought to build up the community here with programs, groups, ministries, and comforts that give glory to God. We just need to be sure they flow out of the central necessities, Word and Sacrament, and not out of mere material or spiritual discontent. We keep first things first and central things central, and only then is it safe and salutary to acknowledge and purpose secondary, peripheral things. The wants are blessings that become temptations when we start to think of them as needs. But they're still blessings. All good gifts come from the Creator, even our future.

In Christ, Pastor Speckhard