

Every three months I get a letter in the mail from the General Board of Pensions. When it arrives I open it up to see if my retirement funds have increased or decreased. Sure I know that I have a few years until I retire; (I just turned 49 last week) but I often wonder how much money I'll need to retire. It reminds me of this commercial...

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zbl_hzSiK8M

So what's your number?

In a news story in USA Today (<http://usat.ly/rqmrDM>) from last week they reported poll results which indicated that 88% of respondents said they were concerned about maintaining a comfortable standard of living in retirement. That was up from last year's 73%.

The article said that "In the past, Americans have differed about what causes the most anxiety. Now retirement has moved to the forefront. Regardless of age, income, education, or political party, the poll found that retirement is at the top of the list."

Since the financial collapse of late 2008 anxiety over finances has been an uncomfortable reality for all of us in some way or another. Whether it is concerns about retirement, your job, home-ownership, college tuition...you fill in the blank. The truth is that anxiety over finances is a reality today. And it is dealing with that uncomfortable anxiety that brings us together today.

So let's start into Paul's words to Timothy.

"Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable." 1 Timothy 6:17 NLT

I'm sure most of us wouldn't count ourselves as rich. You see that is the problem, most of us don't consider ourselves rich, financially at least. Rich is always someone else. Rich is a number that we'll know when we get there; until then we're not rich! But ask the two billion+ people who live on less than two dollars a day if you and I are rich and they'll tell you that we are rich.

Remember these statistics I recently shared: If you make \$24,000 a year, you are over the ninetieth percentile of wealth. And, if you have access to \$80,000 a year, you are in the top one percent of wealth in the world.

That gives us a little perspective to realize that Paul is talking to you and me. So, let's go back and start reading this passage again since we know that it applies to all of us.

17 Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. (Philips Translation uses the image: Don't rest the weight of your confidence on the transitory power of wealth.) Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment.

This verse sets out the gap that we as Christian Atheists experience. We believe that God is trustworthy, we believe that God richly blesses us with what we need for our enjoyment and we believe that we can trust God to provide for our daily needs, BUT...

But are we willing to let go of what we hold so tightly and trust God?

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1PyMFZV0nwQ&feature=youtube_gdata_player

Sure the money that you have in your pocket says, "In God We Trust," but that isn't the way most of us live. We live in the gap between trusting God and our concerns about daily living. We trust in the transitory power of wealth, we express pride in our things that we accumulate around us and as a result we find ourselves riding the waves of uncertainty as stock markets rise and fall, as jobs come and go and as we watch the cost of living outpace our income.

Jesus met a young man one day who, like us, had a gap between what he believed and how he lived. He believed all the right things; he kept the commandments by honoring his parents, honoring other's bodies, their marriages, and reputations and he loved his neighbors. But when he asked Jesus what he lacked, Jesus invited him to trust God by selling all his possessions and giving everything to the poor. When the rich young man had divested himself of everything he possessed; then Jesus invited the young man to come and follow him.

If you know the story, what did the young man who had great wealth do?

That's right he went away sad. There was a gap that was holding him back from living what he said he believed. All Jesus wanted from the young man was to trust God and not his wealth. He couldn't do it; so how do we?

How do we close the gap between what we believe and how we live? How do we live as those who are rich in this world and avoid placing our trust in our unreliable money?

Well let's start by putting some context around Paul's words to Timothy. Earlier in the chapter Paul writes about contentment. In verse 8 Paul says: *If we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.* He makes that statement after noting that we brought nothing into this world and we can't take anything with us when we die.

So contentment is NOT about the things that we accumulate around us; but something far deeper, contentment is about an attitude that comes from a satisfaction found apart from things. Paul spoke about contentment earlier in Philippians 4 when he wrote: I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances- having plenty or being in want.

For many of us contentment is found in things. The right things accumulated around us brings us pleasure or enjoyment. The rich young man wasn't interested in getting rid of his things; he couldn't trust Jesus without something physical to lean on. But as we've

all experienced; contentment based on things is temporary. It has an expiration date; or worse yet it stops satisfying and we want bigger and better to fill our contentment expectation.

Now let me clarify something here; and Craig Groeschel makes this point in his book, "God isn't against people having money and things, but God certainly hates when money and things have his people." (p. 182)

If we are going to find contentment it will not be in riches and the trappings that go along with riches; contentment is an inner reliance upon God in every circumstance of life. Contentment is 'trusting' God regardless of the circumstances; trusting God's promises and experiencing God's peace.

Paul warned Timothy (v. 9) that people who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires. That is when Paul writes to Timothy the oft misquoted passage: *For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.*

We need to remember that money is amoral. Money isn't good or bad; it's the values we attach to it or the ways that we use and misuse money that makes it evil. As Paul says: It is the love of money that is at the root of evil.

Contentment is not found in wealth and riches; contentment is found in trusting God.

The recent flooding is a great reminder of the temporary value in things. As I pulled possession after possession from a home over in the village of Union Deposit I was surrounded by reminder after reminder of the temporary value of things and how quickly all of that can be taken from us.

Ok, let's get back to what Paul commands Timothy to teach those of us who are rich. Here's how we close the gap between what we believe and how we live.

18 Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and generous to those in need, always being ready to share with others.

Do good.

Be rich in good works.

Be generous and willing to share.

What's the point? What difference will doing these things make to our trusting God? Every time we act in accordance with what we believe it will remind us that what we have is not ours but God's and we will learn to trust God more and more every time we do good, give of our time and share with others generously.

When we start doing these things we put into operation the biblical law of blessing. Jesus said it is more blessed to give than to receive. It's not just a good thing; it's a better way to live. It leads to more joy in your life. Every time I give I feel better; I feel blessed! And I bet you always feel blessed as well!

Last month Chris Wagner and I had the opportunity to spend an afternoon with Henry, a pastor from Sierra Leone who was in the area visiting his brother. While Henry was here in the US he participated in a mission trip to NYC with the people from Alison UMC in Carlisle. What was fascinating about Henry's experience was that he was rehabbing homes. That doesn't sound spectacular until you realize what kind of home Henry and his family live in, if you can call it a home. Henry's home is a few pieces of sheet metal and wood. No plumbing, no electricity...

But Henry never complained about his lack; he was content. Then he told Chris and me about a dream he had after working in NYC. Henry said that God told him he would have a home one day.

Henry went to NYC to do good. He was a blessing to many others and I believe that God will bless him and his family with a better home in Sierra Leone someday. But even if it takes years from now I've learned that Henry not only believes God provides Henry lives in such a way that demonstrates he knows what it means to trust God.

Henry's example makes one think that maybe our problem is we're so rich and have so many things, that we miss out on the kind of faith that not only believes but lives like God will provide.

I look forward to the day when all of God's people not only believe that God is trustworthy but live in a way that demonstrates total and complete trust in God. We will see God move in a powerful way as lives of others are touched and changed by disciples who give generously of their resources and time.

And here's something very important I want you to hear: I don't share this message because of what I want *from* you; but what I want *for* you. There is a blessing that comes from trusting God completely and I want you to experience that blessing!

I look forward to the day when disciples trust God enough to give a tithe, not because it is required but because they understand that it is a sign of trusting God. When we as a church give generously we will see more and more people touched through our ministries.

I look forward to the day when disciples trust God enough to joyously give time to doing good works confident that God will repay the time invested in others.

Paul says to Timothy that those who are rich who learn to close the gap between what we believe and how we live will:

19 By doing this they will be storing up their treasure as a good foundation for the future so that they may experience true life. NLT

This morning I want to challenge you take a step toward closing that gap between what we believe and how we live. In 2 Corinthians 9 Paul challenges the believers to make generosity a part of the fabric of their life. And he specifically challenges them to 'give what we have decided in our heart to give.' (v. 7) Notice that Paul is encouraging us to determine what we give and then give it. Not sporadically, not after we see what we have left at the end of the month, not when we feel like it. We need to give what we have determined God is asking us to give as a sign of trust.

People who set an annual goal for their giving actually end up giving twice as much as people who give based on what I can afford each week.

One way that we encourage you to do that at Linglestown Life is by using our electronic giving. You determine when to give and how much and you not only get to bless God through your giving to the church but you will be trusting God.

So what's your number? What's the number that will move you to close the gap between trusting in your riches and trusting in God?

Christian Atheist

I Believe in God, But What's Mine is Mine

What's Your Number?

What are your current financial anxieties?

"Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable." 1 Timothy 6:17 NLT

In God We Trust

Where is your trust?

Read Matthew 6:19-24

How do you experience the struggle to serve two masters?

Rich Young Man

Matthew 19:16-22

How hard would it be for you to sell everything, give it all away and follow Jesus?

What would be the hardest thing for you to give up? Why?

Contentment

“If we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.”

1 Timothy 6:8

What is the basis of your contentment?

Read Philippians 4:11-13

God isn't against people having money and things, but God certainly hates when money and things have his people. Craig Groeschel

What does that quote say to you?

Closing the Gap

“Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and generous to those in need, always being ready to share with others.” 1 Timothy 6:18

Do good –

Be rich in good works-

Be generous and willing to share-

How can you close the gap between what you believe and how you live in each of these ways listed above?

“Not about what I want *from* you, but what I want *for* you.”

“By doing this they will be storing up their treasures as a good foundation for the future so that they may experience true life.” 1 Timothy 6:19

Follow up

Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-9

What is your annual goal for giving?

How does that goal assist you in closing the gap between what you believe and how you live?

Consider cleaning out some of your ‘stuff’ and making a donation to a service organization. How can that help you to consider what makes you content?

Next Week: I Believe in God, But... Pursue Happiness at Any Cost

1 Corinthians 6:12-20; Proverbs 14:12; Hebrews 11:25