

“About Christians Living Comfortably” by Pastor Rand Lankheet,

From Covenant Reformed Church of Toronto. Preached May 15, 2011, for the second service.

Scripture reading: 1 Timothy 6:3-10, 17-21. Text: 6:6-10, 17-19.

Introduction: “People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap.” [Repeat.

That’s vs. 9 of 1 Timothy chapter 6. Now, we as Christians today might say this:

“Well, that’s not us. We don’t want to get rich. We just want to be ... well...

“comfortable”...and someday to enjoy a nice retirement of leisure and travel.”

But what does it mean to be financially comfortable?

From the context of Paul’s day, it means to be rich.

You see, in Paul’s day, to be rich meant that you had sufficient food, shelter, and clothing.

That’s it. The rich had enough food, shelter, and clothing. The poor didn’t have those things.

The rich had “shelter.” Shelter in that day meant just a small home, usually an apartment.

Maybe just 700 or 800 square feet of living space. No running water, no hot water, no hydro.

The home heated from one fireplace. Light provided by candles.

No nice beds or thick mattresses to sleep on. Just a thin pad, usually on the floor.

The rich also had clothing. But just 3 or 4 changes of clothes, in addition to what you were wearing. The poor people of that day just had 1 or 2 changes of clothing.

Likewise, the rich could have 3 or 4 pairs of sandals. The poor had just one pair.

What kind of food did the rich people of that day eat?

Well, eating meat every day, was for the very rich. Especially those who lived in the city.

The ordinary rich people mostly ate vegetables, and grain pounded into a kind of porridge.

There would be no figs or grapes in the wintertime, even for rich people.

Even for fairly rich people, 95% of what they earned, was spent on the basics:

food, shelter, clothing.

-Compare our standard of living in Canada, today. We live in one of the richest countries

in the world. Dr. Frank Barker quotes this statistic: Pretend that the whole world were reduced to just 100 people. 100 people in a village, representing the whole world today.

-Of those 100 people, only 1 would have a college or university education; only 1 out of 100!

-50 of those 100 would either be starving or malnourished. ½ of the world, either starving or malnourished, not getting enough food or the right kinds of food;

-80 of those 100 would live in substandard housing, either with no flooring, or cracks

in the walls, or leaking roofs; 80% of the world’s pop. lives in substandard housing.

In comparison, we today, in Canada, are among the rich, among the richest of the world's pop.
-Vs. 9, says that people who want to get rich fall into temptation.

We've defined "rich" as being "financially comfortable." Paul is saying, then, that those who want to become "financially comfortable" fall into temptation. ***That's you and I.***

We start with ***that definition*** of who are the rich, from Paul's perspective.

2. What's the temptation? What's the temptation for us, financially comfortable as we are?

2.A. [Read vs. 9. Those financially comfortable, *can fall into a trap.*

We can fall into many harmful desires that plunge us into destruction.

What are those harmful desires? And how do we become trapped by those desires?

Well, a basic desire, fed by our comfortable living, by having money...is that we then want more.

More and more and more. It's like a drug habit: once you start with a small amount of drugs, getting high, you find you need more and more of that drug, as time goes on.

Experts in drug addiction call that "escalation." Over time, it takes more of that drug to reach the same high. So, for us, it can take more money, and more things,

to reach the same level of pleasure, as time goes on.

Let me illustrate. From my own life....I started out my adult life, in my first full-time job,

with one TV, a boxy colour TV. It was perfectly ok, nothing wrong with it. But the

marketers and the merchants told me that I really needed something more and better.

And in a larger family, we can be told that we should no longer satisfied with one TV...no,

we should have 2 or 3 TV's, so that each one in the family can watch his/her own

favourite TV program.

And then it cannot be the old boxy TV. Today, it must be a big, flat screen TV.

The bigger the better. Now, of course, technology also changed,

and many of us found our old TV's with analogue signals, no longer worked.

But, getting new TVs, we could be satisfied with just with ordinary sound. But...no.

Today we need stereo sound, digital, Dolby, surround sound.

There's no end. The drug of being financially comfortable,

with 20x, 30x more luxuries than the Christians in Paul's day.

[Read Vs. 10. Notice it's the "love" of money. Now, we can deceive ourselves with this verse....

We can say, as Christians, "No, I don't love money, I just happen to have some of it.

And I do like what I have. But am I filled with craving for money. No, that's not me."

We say we don't love money. But, surely we love, or at least really like,

our homes, our cars, our vacations. We really like our comfy retirements, our RRSP accounts. That, brothers and sisters, is indeed money. We should be honest and admit it. Most of us, do indeed love our money. And most of us would really like more of it.

And not just the young people...I find many people in the older generation loving their money even more than some in the younger generation.

Here's a test: Let me ask. If Jesus came to us today, and told us to give away everything we own, who of us would do that? Could we get rid of all our stuff...our homes, our cars, our high paying jobs, our RRSPs? And then would we be willing to rely only on Jesus who promises to take care of us, if we just trusted him.

You know that when Jesus walked on this earth, he did command some people to do just that...get rid of it all, and follow him. Could you do that? Could I?

Imagine if we did that. And as Jesus' followers, without lots of money or possessions, we would probably have to live together, and share our resources and possessions.

Living in Christian community—each one contributing, everyone sharing.

Well, in Acts chapter 2, that's exactly what many of the Christians did. Read it sometime, 2:42f.

The early Christians started to live together, sharing 100% of their finances and resources. If we did that, in the end, most of us probably would be happier in life.

And in a Christian, communal setting most of us probably would become better Christians.

2.B. Well, two other temptations, from financial comfort, are listed in these verses.

-[Read vs. 10b. "*Wandered from the faith* and pierced themselves with many griefs."

If a person wants to become more and more financially comfortable, here's what often happens.

They easily get consumed by their job, by their career, by advancing in their career.

Some Christians find themselves working 65, 70, 75 hour weeks.

Now, there are times in our careers, where we might have to work extra hours.

But we must limit that to certain times or seasons in our lives.

What often happens, with all those long work hours, is that our marriages and families suffer.

And we suffer, physically, mentally, psychologically...and worst of all, we suffer spiritually.

We start to find we can't make it to church on some Sundays.

Why not? Our bodies are too exhausted, our minds too drained.

And, during the week, we cannot be involved in anything at church, with our br/sisters.

It can easily become one of these unintended consequences: we enjoy work.

And in some of our ethnic circles, we are told to work hard. And we start to enjoy

the money and perks that come with hard work, and extra money.

But, if we are honest, little by little, trying to get comfortable, to achieve early retirement, maybe...it is draining our souls. Our love for Christ starts to get colder. You? +

2.C. One other temptation: [Read vs. 17. “Not to be arrogant.”

Those who are financially comfortable can become arrogant, full of pride.

You see, when someone becomes [quote] “successful” in life, most people think they have great wisdom...to be able to earn so much money.

Wealthy people will be asked: “what’s your secret? How did you become so successful?”

And that is a very flattering question to be asked. That wealthy person thinks:

“I must have some “secret.” I must be special in some way. I must have great wisdom that others do not have.” Subtly, the devil starts to work pride within them....

they start thinking of themselves more highly than they ought.

Who dares tell a wealthy man or woman that in some things they might not be so wise?

The Proverbs say this: “The poor are shunned even by their neighbours, but the rich have many friends.” Friends who flatter them, instead of correcting and rebuking them.

It is one of the biggest temptations upon a “financially comfortable” person...that he/she begins to fall into pride and arrogance. And won’t humble themselves before God.

3. That brings us then, to some *instructions*. Instructions for “financially comfortable” Christians.

3.A. [Read vs. 5...to vss. 6-8. Unlike the “drug” of money and possessions.

There were false teachers in Ephesus, in and around the church of which Timothy was pastor.

Many of them, says Paul, are in it for the money....not unlike some famous preachers today.

But we, Paul, Timothy, pastors today, Christians today, *must learn contentment*.

In Philippians 4:12, Paul calls it a “secret”...something you have to work hard to discover, by God’s grace, in Christ Jesus. That instead of craving more and more of the drug of money, the drug of more possessions, we must learn contentment, in Jesus Christ.

The model and example in the NT church was not to become rich, though in God’s providence, some did become rich. But the main example in the New Testament is to have little money, but to enjoy great contentment.

So Jesus himself. He said: “The birds have nests, the foxes have dens, but the son of Man has no where to lay his head.” No home that he owned. No bank accounts.

So the apostle Paul himself...he says in Philippians, I know what it is to have nothing.

And in prison, he only had some bread, a little food, a little water. That was it.

We have to learn to be content with the necessities: food, clothing, shelter.
And then to discover that in Jesus, we have plenty of riches....so much to enjoy.

Think of it....we have all the riches of Christ Jesus...the riches of justification and sanctification. The riches of his agape love and His shalom peace.

As we trust in Jesus, our Saviour, and our Lord.

Those riches are far greater, and give more lasting pleasure,

than all the material riches of the world.

3.B. A second point of instruction. [Read vs. 17.

Rich Christians, sorry, let me say “comfortable Christians”—***we must put our hope in God.***

God who becomes our Heavenly Father as we trust in Jesus as our Saviour.

That he has rescued us from our sin, and from His wrath on our sin.

And now He goes with us, through each difficulty in life, as our kind and compassionate Father.

-You see, if a wealthy non-Christian has a difficulty or problem in life,

he can throw money at that problem: Have a problem with alcohol or drugs?

Enrol in a \$20,000 treatment program, that no one has to know about.

Get caught over the legal limit of driving under the influence of alcohol?

Get a expensive lawyer, he can make the charge go away.

For your children, too. Have a problem with a disobedient child?

Again, throw money at that child. Give him counsellors and treatment programs.

But, as Christians we must especially put our hope in our God and Father.

Yes, at times, we may need a counsellor, or extra help;

but we first put our hope in God the Father.

Vs. 17, last part: He, the Lord God, “richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.”

3.C. A third instruction: [Read vss. 18-19.

It's not wrong for a Christian to be financially comfortable.

It's not wrong to become rich, even by modern standards today.

But, to counteract the temptation upon our souls, to avoid the spiritual traps in life,

We who become richer, more wealthy, must also become more generous with our money.

If we take and keep our money, and if we want more and more, soon we fall into that trap.

So Paul says, God says, through Paul, (vs. 18b) “be generous and be willing to share.”

To share you wealth, to share in what God gives you, financially.

And not just that, to put money in an offering plate for some Christians is quite easy.

Paul says, we also must be “rich” in doing good deeds.

We give back to God, not only a portion of our treasures...but we give of our talents and our time.

Using our time, and using our God-given talents, for doing good works.

Again, especially in the context of the church.

Go back to 1 Tim 3:15. Read.

Paul is writing to young pastor Timothy, pastor of the church in the city of Ephesus.

A big and wealthy city in that day.

The church in that city was the very pillar and foundation of God’s truth.

So in our giving, we support the church today. The church stands as a strong pillar,
upholding and proclaiming God’s truth in our world today.

The church proclaims Jesus Christ, and Him crucified, for our sins.

And that truth becomes the very foundation of life itself...true, and lasting, and enjoyable life.

Life with God, and in fellowship with God’s people.

-May we be not only members of that church, financially comfortable members.

But by God’s grace, may we guard against the temptations of riches. And not fall into that trap.

May we not become addicting to gaining more and more things, more and more stuff.

Which can clutter our lives, and choke out our love for Jesus and his church.

Instead, let us grow in our love for Christ, in our love for gospel.

And let us eager more fellowship, true fellowship with one another, in the church, today.

Then we shall be very, very rich indeed.

Let us pray.