

Pastor Daniel Iwinski

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Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

St. Paul's (WELS) Moline, IL

3:36

### How Much is Enough?

1 Timothy 2:1-8

A. *While the sinful heart wants to give its least;*

B. *God gives us His most.*

“Greed is good.” Those words were spoken by Gordon Gekko in 1987’s hit movie by director Oliver Stone, “Wall Street.” Gordon Gekko, of course is a fictional character, played by actor Michael Douglas. In many ways the movie summed up what many people thought of the decade of the 80’s: greed, selfishness, and an unhealthy competitiveness.

Friday evening some twenty three years later the movie, “Wall Street, the Money Never Sleeps” opened up. Michael Douglas returns in his role as Gordon Gekko this time saying: “Someone reminded me I once said “Greed is good”. Now it seems it's legal. Because everyone is drinking the same Kool Aid.” It seems that in many ways things haven’t changed a whole lot. People are still struggling with greed and in many different ways we are asking the question, how much is enough?

How much work is enough? Within the last two weeks in France there was a worker’s strike. The reason? The government of France wanted--out of financial necessity--to raise the retirement age from 60 to 62. The result? The people were outraged at having to work an additional two years and went on strike.

Congress has come to a standstill trying to determine how much taxes are enough to pay for everything. Should everyone keep the current tax cuts or should only the middle class--those earning less than \$250,000 a year--receive the tax cuts?

In a different way this week saw the closing of the last manufacturing plant for the traditional incandescent light bulb--it was a GE factory. Gone are the old inefficient light bulbs as they are now replaced by much more efficient ones. All of us are confronted with our consumption--how much gas and electricity do we really need to be using?

None of these questions can compare to the single most important question anyone can ask and answer: How much is needed to be right with God and to have a place in heaven?

Jesus says, **“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”** (Matthew 5:48) and for good reason. God says in no uncertain terms of heaven that: **“Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are**

**written in the Lamb's book of life.”** (Revelation 21:27). As we examine ourselves today and see all of our frailties, our faults, and even worse--those sins we committed out of our own selfish wills--we see that we need a lot.

How much is enough? In some ways the answer is rather easy--we need perfection. We need to have all of our bad taken away and we need everything good. By God’s grace we have already seen this in action this morning as Chloe Wiese was baptized in God’s name. Make no mistake about this. This wasn’t our work appeasing God but rather it was God’s work in Chloe’s life. Remember the words of our Catechism as we are directed to Titus 3: **“[God] saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”**

God baptized Chloe this morning. God gave Himself and the perfect life of Christ Jesus while at the same time washing away her sin and the separation from God that that brings. God gave His all--nothing less. Anything less wouldn’t be enough for what we need for salvation and a right relationship with God.

Today when we think of God and our faith we cannot think in terms of how little, or what is the minimum. Rather, when we think of God and our faith, God wants us to think in terms of much and the greatest. This, in many ways, is the point of our text this morning.

Paul writes this letter to the young pastor Timothy encouraging him in his ministry to focus on the greatest and the broadest and the most. What does Paul say: **“I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone--for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”** (verses 1-4).

It must be stated that Paul did not write these words to Timothy purely as instruction as if Timothy prior to this did not know that he and the congregation were supposed to pray during worship. That, of course, would be ridiculous. Rather, Paul was encouraging the young Timothy and the congregation to live bold lives in Christ. Paul wanted Timothy and the congregation to experience and live in the greatness of God.

You, young pastor Timothy you have a God who will listen to every one of your wants and needs and answer them in a way that is best for you. Young Timothy, you do not have a God with whom you have to debate with or argue into giving blessings but you have a God who is gracious and good and is powerful.

Paul uses four different words for prayer. (The word “prayer” in this section is a broad word for prayer.) Why? Because there are so many things to pray for: we are to make requests to God because we are a people in need and we live in a world that so often hates and persecutes us. We are called to make intercession because our faith in Christ allows us to live and speak so boldly to God that we can call Him, “Our Father.” And we are a people who do receive from God—our prayers are answered—and for that we can and ought to give thanks to God. Paul uses four words for prayer because God wants us to think of Him in grand and good ways.

In God we can ask for anything. Jesus couldn’t have said it plainer: **“You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”** (John 14:14). Our problem is too often we either fail to ask or we ask for too little. James the brother of Jesus reminds us: **“You do not have, because you do not ask God.”** (James 4:2).

We have a God who doesn’t give us His least but His most. Paul directs our attention to Jesus. **“For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”** (verse 5). Why does Paul say this? Simply to remind us that God loves us so much that He Himself became flesh and lived and died that we may have life. If God did this while we were still His enemies, how much more will He do for us in His name?

What I find amazing about these words of encouragement to Timothy is the scope of people that Paul is encouraging Timothy to pray for. Make prayers for everyone—including those in high authority. Do you know who was in charge of the Roman Empire at the time Paul wrote these words? It was the Emperor Nero—that mostly crazed Emperor who would eventually brutally persecute Christians and have Peter and Paul die as martyrs. Yes, Timothy pray for everyone.

Jesus said: **“But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”** (Matthew 5:44-48).

That is a great calling and not an easy one. God doesn’t ask for small lives from His children, neither does He give us too little in this world. Our problem is that too often we think of our lives in Christ with the mindset of the minimum.

How much is enough? Today, Chloe like all of us who have been baptized into Christ has enough—she has the cross of Christ. What from here?

I started to think about this over this last week. If Chloe lives to be eighty she will live to hear of and experience the anticipation of a new century, the year 2100. If Chloe lives to be ninety—a very reasonable number with today’s advances in medicine she will see that century with her own eyes.

What do you think the world is going to be like over the next eighty to ninety years? Only God knows. What we do know is that these next several years—these precious years of development—will plot the trajectory for her whole life. How much God will be enough?

How many prayers will she need? How much careful, clear instruction will she need? How many words of encouragement that our faith is real and substantive will she need? How much is enough?

Do any of us doubt that as time progresses it is getting more, not less difficult to live as a person of faith in this world?

Of course what I am saying about Chloe is really applying to all of us each in our own way. How much is enough? God is enough; Jesus is enough; faith is enough. None of these are small, none of these are little, none of these are weak or ineffective. That’s the point, and that’s the life that Paul wants us to see today and live every day. Amen.