

CONTENTMENT AND THE BELIEVER
PHILIPPIANS 4:9-13

INTRODUCTION

The things of this world breed in us a *discontentment* while offering to bring us *contentment*. (e.g. The express purpose of most advertising is to make us *discontent* with what we have and to stir a hunger in us for what they are advertising!)

We know we live in a world full of *discontentment*:

Marriages are shattered because of *discontentment*.

Crimes are committed because of *discontentment*.

People are swindled out of their life savings because of *discontentment*. (e.g. Get rich quick schemes)

The things of this world breed *discontentment* so, consequently this world is filled with *discontentment*!

Nevertheless, though we as Believers are in this world we are not to be of this world. The Bible calls on Believers to be *content*.

1 Timothy 6:6, 8– “6 But godliness with contentment is great gain. . .8 and having food and raiment let us therewith be content.”

Hebrews 13:5– “Let your conversation [i.e. behavior or manner of living] be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for He [the Lord] hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”

This idea of *contentment* is foreign to most of us. That’s because we live in a world that is driven by *discontentment*!

So let me ask: Are you experiencing the supernatural satisfaction [i.e. contentment] that God longs for you to enjoy?

Contentment. What does it mean? How does it work? Is it really possible in every circumstance? Let’s take a closer look at this matter of *contentment*.

I. LETS EXAMINE THE MEANING OF CONTENTMENT.

Webster defines the word “*contentment*” as *the state of being satisfied or pleased*.

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The word translated “*contentment*” in the New Testament means “*satisfied,*” “*adequate,*” “*competent,*” or “*sufficient.*”

It is translated *sufficient* in *2 Corinthians 12:9*, where God told Paul, “*My grace is sufficient for thee.*” It is used there to mean “*to be satisfactory,*” “*to be enough*” or “*to be more than enough.*”

In *verse 11* of our text, Paul uses the word to describe his condition of *being inwardly satisfied in his physical environment*. (i.e. Paul was saying, “*I have learned to be content whatever my circumstances.*”)

So what does it mean to be *content*?

Let’s combine the idea of being *inwardly satisfied* in the midst of difficult circumstances with the concept of *sufficiency*. And we must not forget God’s role in the process.

What do we get? A working definition: **Christian contentment is the God-given ability to be satisfied with the loving provision of God in any and every situation.**

II. LET’S EXAMINE THE MISREPRESENTATION OF CONTENTMENT.

Sometimes the best way to understand an abstract concept is to identify what it is not. **So, let’s look at five common misconceptions about contentment:**

A. Contentment Is Not An External Matter!

A few years ago at a Christian concert, the performer joked that sometimes her problems are so overwhelming that the only solution to them is a banana split. (Ice cream helps!)

We laugh until we realize that this is precisely how we naturally approach difficulties sometimes.

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When the pressure is on, we treat ourselves to a little luxury, a special treat. And it helps! The special treat *satisfies*— at least for awhile.

But that sort of *contentment* doesn't last. It can't. Christian *contentment* is a matter of the heart, and **external solutions can never satisfy internal needs!**

B. Contentment Is Not The Denial Of Reality!

Denial of reality is normal. It temporarily helps us cope. But it is **NOT** the same thing as *contentment*. Some people live in a continual state of denial.

Some deny that anything is wrong physically with them when they are truly sick.

Some deny that anything is wrong spiritually with them when they are living in sin.

Christian contentment has nothing to do with denial and everything to do with understanding!

God doesn't want us to live as if a bleak prognosis or an intolerable situation doesn't exist. **He wants us to trust Him to give us a supernatural ability to live life completely satisfied regardless of the situations that exist!**

C. Contentment Is Not Equivalent To The Pursuit Of Pleasure!

The ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus wrote these words:
"We call pleasure the beginning and end of the blessed life. For we recognize pleasure as the first good innate in us; and from pleasure we return again, using the feeling as the standard by which we judge good."

Now that is a worldly, hedonistic mind set! And the Christian community in America is not immune from having that same worldly, hedonistic mind set!

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More than ever before we are confronted with the **"Prosperity Gospel"**— That is a warped view of the Christian life. I call it a **"hunky-dory"** view of Christianity. Some public religious leaders claim that God's purpose in dealing with man is to grant him the best of everything—To make your life **"hunky-dory!"** Let me plainly say—That is wrong!

How easy it is to pursue good times and superficial pleasures, label them *"clean fun"* or even *"Christian,"* and then claim (for the sake of appearances) to be satisfied. Yet the Christian pleasure-seeker will eventually discover that such pursuits do not lead to *contentment*, but rather to emptiness and despair.

Let's consider the words of a very wise king who for a time neglected God for the sake of pleasure. (***Ecclesiastes 2:1-11***)

None of us is able to pursue pleasure with the same gusto that Solomon did. But we must not allow ourselves to be fooled into believing that our outcome would be any different from his.

Richard Halverson, a former chaplain of the U.S. Senate, offers this interesting insight, *"Something deep in human nature makes it incapable of handling more than it needs. Rather than satisfaction, affluence seems to generate dissatisfaction."*

So,
**D. Contentment Is Not Equivalent To The Pursuit Of Pleasure...
CONTENTMENT IS NOT THE SAME THING AS
COMPLACENCY!**

To be *satisfied with God's provisions* in the midst of difficult circumstances is one thing. But to foster a complacent *"ho-hum, woe is me, I am what I am"* attitude is another.

Christian *contentment* and ambition, either personal or spiritual, are not conflicting ideals. Contentment doesn't mean that we should not have some ambition about us! Unfortunately, our world is filled with people who are lazy and refuse to be ambitious!

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Contented as he was, Paul told the Philippians that he was far from being satisfied with his past accomplishments. Look at *Philippians 3:12-16*.

Paul was never complacent! He was a visionary who was still pressing forward with the will of God for his life until the day he died!

E. **Contentment Is Not The Same As Determination!**

I remember seeing a beautiful poster of a seagull in flight with the caption: “*They can fly because they think they can fly.*”

I found out that comes from some so-called experts that claim that because of their awkward build, it is aerodynamically impossible for sea gulls to fly. But don’t tell that to the seagull. He thinks he can fly, so he does what he’s not supposed to be able to do—he flies! (I didn’t fact check that!)

Now, I don’t know much about the aerodynamics or willpower of sea gulls, but I do know a bit about humans.

Our Creator has made us with the capacity to endure a great deal of difficulty. Some people, through the determination of their wills, can endure virtually every circumstance without being noticeably troubled.

But that kind of sturdy resolution or determination is not the same thing as Biblical contentment.

Contentment is deeper and more meaningful than that. We can exercise personal resolve apart from Christ. But we cannot experience Christ’s contentment apart from Christ!

So we’ve seen, THE MEANING OF CONTENTMENT...

THE MISREPRESENTATION OF CONTENTMENT...

III. **LET’S EXAMINE THE MYSTERY OF CONTENTMENT.**

Understand that true *contentment* is a paradox. It’s simple; yet it’s so complex.

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It involves truths that one wouldn’t expect to apply to other truths. **Let’s take a closer look at just two of the many mysteries of Christian contentment:**

A. **True Contentment Results In Deep Dissatisfaction!**

(Oxymoron)

One who experiences the *contentment* that comes from God is, in a sense, the most *satisfied* person in the world. Yet, in another sense, he is the most *dissatisfied*. How can this be?

1. A Believer who has learned the skill of *contentment* has been enabled by God to be *satisfied* even in the worst conditions.
2. At the same time, however, he can never again be *satisfied* with the shallow substitutes of *contentment* that the world has to offer apart from Christ. *(i.e. Once he has tasted Christian contentment he will never again be satisfied with anything less.)*

Christian *contentment* is not the result of addition, but of subtraction. It would seem when we lack *contentment* that we need to add something to make up for that lack. But that is NOT so with genuine *contentment*.

I would venture to say that most, if not all, of the ladies here have at one time or another said to yourself, “*I don’t have anything to wear*”? What is the solution? Adding a new outfit to your wardrobe! Now, that may bring temporary *contentment*, but we all know that deep within us we always crave more.

And is it possible to be *content* when a tight budget makes adding to the wardrobe impossible? For the Believer the answer is an emphatic “**Yes.**” What is needed a lot of times is not so much added possessions, but subtracted desires.

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This was part of Paul's secret to *contentment* in *Philippians 4:11-13*, in which he writes that he had learned to be *content* in any and every situation.

The Lord had enabled him to reduce his desires for even the essentials. What a powerful evidence of the strength of Christ in Paul's life!

I believe this is what David had in mind when he wrote *Psalms 37:4* – “*Delight thyself also in the LORD and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.*”

It is commonplace to understand this verse to mean that God wants to fulfill our desires. But that's not what he was getting at.

David was saying that if our delight is in the LORD then the LORD will transform our desires so that they will actually reflect His desires.

He will enable us to want what He wants for us. He will then satisfy those wants. The Lord has no intention of fulfilling the desires of our old man, our flesh, but if we are experiencing Christian *contentment* it won't matter to us.

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It is God's intention for the Christian life to be miraculous— that is, it is to be a life that is so unique that onlookers should have no possible explanation for the quality of life they observe apart from the work of God!

So it is with Christian *contentment*. It is impossible apart from the supernatural work of Christ in the life of the believer. One of the most famous verses in the New Testament is *Philippians 4:13* here, “*I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me.*”

Have you ever wondered why that verse immediately follows Paul's bold statements about *contentment*? Simply because Paul recognizes that the source and strength of all *contentment* in the life of the Believer is Christ Himself!

Paul is not saying that Christ has given him unlimited strength. He's simply saying that the reason he can experience *contentment*, even in the worst of circumstances, is because he is a continual recipient of supernatural strength. Christ is able and willing to provide all the strength that we need to be *content*, in ALL circumstances, at ALL times!

But how does it happen? Christ provides His strength through a process called “*infusion.*” In the medical world, *infusion* is the slow and steady introduction of a solution into the vein.

In our daily world, we witness *infusion* every time we drop a tea bag into a cup of hot water or brew a cup of coffee!

For the Believer, *infusion* is the steady flow of the power of God into the realm of life where it is needed.

How does Christian *infusion* work? The process may be summed up with two words: *discipline* and *dependence*.

A. Discipline.

1. The Discipline Of Regularly Confessing Our Sin.

So, we've seen, *THE MEANING OF CONTENTMENT...*

THE MISREPRESENTATION OF CONTENTMENT...

THE MYSTERY OF CONTENTMENT...

Lastly,

IV. LET'S EXAMINE THE MIRACLE OF *CONTENTMENT*.

What comes to your mind when you think of the word *miracle*?

A miracle is not necessarily just something sensational or spectacular. But rather it is something that cannot be explained apart from God.

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Christ *infuses* His strength into us when we **regularly confess our sin**. Just as an obstruction in an intravenous tube prevents a patient from receiving a much-needed *infusion* of medicine, so unconfessed sin keeps us from receiving Christ's supernatural strength.

We must keep short accounts with God, realizing that apart from the regular confession of sin He will not provide His strength to meet us at our point of need. **Where there is no confession, there can be no true contentment.**

2. **The Discipline Of Getting Into God's Word.**

Often the Lord gives us His strength by bringing to mind passages and promises that speak directly to the need at hand. (*e.g. I can't tell you how many times this has been a reality in my life.*)

But listen such remembering doesn't happen in a vacuum. We will remember only what we have read, studied, and meditated on.

The importance of getting into God's Word may be seen if we take another look at the illustration of the *infusion* of tea into water. **What is the difference between a strong cup of tea and a weak cup? Time.**

The longer the process, the more thoroughly the water gets into the tea and the tea into the water. **The longer we spend in the Scriptures, the stronger we become. The more we get into God's Word, the more it will get into us.**

A couple of other disciplines to consider:
The Discipline Of Church Attendance!

The Discipline Of Prayer! (*That brings us to...*)

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B. **Dependence.**

Discipline focuses on the realm of the will, *dependence* is a matter of the heart. We need God today just as much as we needed Him the day we were born again.

We must daily place our trust in the Lord Jesus to provide the grace that leads to contentment. His living grace—like His saving grace—is activated by acts of *dependent trust*.

Our level of dependence on the Lord is best revealed by examining our prayer lives. Rather than begging God to make us feel peaceful we can *dependently* thank Him for the peace that He is willing to express through us if we will but let Him.

The result will be miraculous—a peacefulness that cannot be explained apart from God. (*Philippians 4:6-7*)

This sort of *dependence* is an indispensable ingredient of Christian *contentment*.

It is not natural to experience inner tranquility while enduring difficult situations. But God is willing to provide for us all of the supernatural strength that we need *to be satisfied* with His loving provision—in all circumstances, at all times.

Are we willing to let Him? Paul was and we can be too.

Conclusion

What is *contentment*? It's more than a feeling, it's an *attitude*.

It's more than an *attitude*, it's a *mind set*.

It's more than a *mind set*, it's a *discipline*.

It's more than *discipline*, it's *dependent trust*.

It's more than *dependent trust*, it's a miracle—a gracious miracle from God.