
Not Complaining, But Content

Hebrews 13:5-6

Tim Nixon

We live in a culture that puts a high value on being happy and having the kind of success that is expected to be the perfect picture of contentment. The assumption of many people is that those who have attained worldly success and are achieving their goals in life are fulfilled and therefore happy, which presupposes they are also content. In fact, the idea of experiencing happiness is so embedded in our culture that we have happy meals, happy hour, and we are cautioned, “don’t worry, be happy!” The Walt Disney Company’s vision statement at one time was “to make people happy,” and while you are in their parks, you are told you are in “the happiest place on earth.”

A Christian man in Hungary went to his pastor and complained, “Life is unbearable. There are nine of us living in one room. What can I do?” The pastor answered, “Take your goat into the room with you.” The man was incredulous, but the pastor insisted, “Do as I say and come back in a week.”

A week later the man returned looking more distraught than before. “We can’t stand it,” he told the pastor. “The goat is filthy.” The pastor said, “Go home and let the goat out, and come back in a week.” A week later the man returned, radiant, exclaiming, “Life is beautiful. We enjoy every minute of it now that there’s no goat—only the nine of us.” (*Reader’s Digest* [12/81].)

Contentment is more a matter of our perspective than of our circumstances, isn’t it!

The exhortation of our text may stem from what the author said in 10:34, where he reminded them that in the former days (10:32), “you ... accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.”

But now they needed endurance (10:36). Perhaps after their property had been unlawfully seized, anxiety had set in. Some of them now were focused on regaining their possessions, no matter what it required. But pursuing material things can easily cross the line into loving them. And the love of money or things (13:5) is opposed to the love of the brethren (13:1).

That is why we should be encouraged by the words of the apostle Paul, who stated that he **learned** to be content no matter what his circumstances: “not that I’m speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content” (Philippians 4:11). In other words, he could know contentment even in the worst situations, his contentment wasn’t based on what was happening around him.

Writing about this Philippians text in his work, “The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment”, Jeremiah Burroughs writes,

‘I have learned’-Contentment in every condition is a great art, a spiritual mystery. It is to be learned, and to be learned as a mystery. And so in verse 12 he affirms: ‘I know how to

be abased, and I now how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed.' The word which is translated 'instructed' is derived from the word that signifies 'mystery'; it is just as if he had said, 'I have learned the mystery of this business.' Contentment is to be learned as a great mystery, and those who are thoroughly trained in this art, which is like Samson's riddle to a natural man, have learned a deep mystery. 'I have learned it'-I do not have to learn it now, nor did I have the art at first; I have attained it, though with much ado, and now, by the grace of God, I have become the master of this art.

The Bible then makes it clear being content is something that must be learned while living in obedience to Jesus Christ each day in the midst of our circumstances whether we are happy or sad, whether or not we have attained success in life.

The search for contentment is not new. Man has been in pursuit of this elusive quality since the beginning of time. In fact, the first two people on earth were not content to live in the garden God had prepared for them, where it certainly could be said that "they had it all."

They had ample food, no weeds to pull, no diseases to fight, and no weather patterns or natural disasters like earthquakes. They were in perfect health and didn't have to worry about security because that was already provided for in an intimate relationship with the almighty God of the universe.

That is what it was like for Adam and Eve. But they were not content. Instead, they had a desire to be like God, to be independent of God, to know as much as God did about good and evil. Adam and Eve thought they would find contentment in their independence from God. Instead, they found that they were discontent. And they became fearful as well, for they recognized that they were naked and without protection.

So, what is contentment?

Again, we see a wonderful definition from Jeremiah Burroughs, "Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition."

Our soul must learn to wait upon the Lord. This is the theme of Psalm 62 and Psalm 130. There is a difference in being self-controlled (a behavior that makes us appear to be at peace) and content (inner heart conviction).

It is a state of settled truth in the soul, even during difficult times.

Now He has come to make a way
And God Himself has paid the price
That all who trust in Him today
Find healing in His sacrifice
That all who trust in Him today
Find healing in His sacrifice

I will wait for You, I will wait for You

Through the storm and through the night
I will wait for You, surely wait for You
For Your love is my delight.¹

READ Hebrews 13:5-6

Learning to be content requires us understanding three major principles from this short passage of Scripture:

Principle Number One: Definite Separation (13:5a)

Contentment is not found in:

- Purses
- Possessions
- Places
- Positions
- Or people

Our lives need to be free from:

Wrong Attachments

God put his church into the world to change it. Unfortunately, the world tends to change the church.

Wrong attachments manifest themselves in conflict. Or so says the Holy Spirit:

- James 4 – quarrels among you because you want your own way
- Gal. 5 – devouring one another
- Philippians 4 – two sisters fighting in the church

If we really examine ourselves closely, we find that we desire the same attachments as the unbeliever.

Temporal Attachments

- Money can buy medicine, but not health.
- Money can buy a house, but not a home.
- Money can buy companionship, but not friends.
- Money can buy entertainment, but not happiness.
- Money can buy food, but not an appetite.
- Money can buy a bed, but not sleep.
- Money can buy a crucifix, but not a Savior.
- Money can buy the good life, but not eternal life.

That explains why we are told in the Scriptures that it is God (alone) who is able to supply us "with all things to enjoy."

Principle Number Two: Immediate Satisfaction (13:5b)

¹ Shane and Shane, *I Will Wait for You*, 2019

God desires that we be satisfied right now with what you have and where you are. The things we lack, if we are godly, are very small in comparison to the things we have. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places...” Ephesians 1:3.

Luther is quoted as saying, “The sea of God's mercies should swallow up all our particular afflictions.” If you pour a pailful of water on the floor of your house, it makes a great show, but if you throw it into the sea, there is no sign of it. So, afflictions considered in themselves, we think are very great, but let them be considered with the sea of god's mercies we enjoy, and then they are not so much, they are nothing in comparison.

Principle Number Three: Intimate Communion (5c-6)

All through the book of Hebrews the author has presented Christ, and he has said, “You can cling to Christ. He is sufficient; He is better; He is superior; He is supreme. He’s all you ever need.” And that’s been the repeated message over and over again.

- This is the God who will never leave or forsake you.
- This is the Lord who is your helper.
- Because He is sufficient; He is better; He is superior; He is supreme. He’s all you ever need – you don’t have to fear.
 - You don’t have to fear not having things.
 - You don’t have to fear what other people will say or do to you.
 - Take everything I have, I don’t care!

The Hebrews had lost a lot. Back in chapter 10:32-34 they had endured reproach and affliction at the hands of others. They experienced the plundering of their property. Some had lost it all!

And to these people, God says, “Be content. Don’t worry if someone has taken everything you have. If you have Jesus, you have it all.”

Do you believe that?

If a man has everything and has not Christ, he has nothing. If he has nothing and has Christ, he has everything. Now let’s face it: you’re going to lose it anyway, either here now, or in the next few weeks, or in a few months, or when you die, or when Jesus comes.

How can you begin to be content? Realize what you deserve. Just sit down and, “What do I really deserve?” You’ll be content.

My Grandparents took a mule ride down the Grand Canyon years ago. When descending the Grand Canyon, often a person has to travel on narrow ledges that have only enough room for a mule to get a foothold. One preacher describes his trip down, “The ribbons of rock that run along the edges of these towering cliffs overlook vertical precipices that descend hundreds of

feet to the valley below. When one must make use of these stony paths, the safest course is to let the mule find his own way; for the slightest touch on the bridle may easily throw both the animal and his rider over the cliff to sudden death. So, it is in the believer's life. In some circumstances, if he would keep himself from having sinful doubts and falling into despair, he must lay the `bridle' on the neck of Faith and commit his way to God. No matter how things look, he may take comfort in these words, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." In such trying experiences the only thing to do is to trust in God and walk by faith, not by sight."²

Let me put it another way –

You need to realign your life under God and His authority. Realize God's supremacy. That is realize God will give you what He thinks you need, and He'll supply what you need for all the things in your life.

Do you spend time with God? Let me tell you something: the longer you concentrate on His glory, the less you're going to care about other things. When you're lost in Jesus Christ, you are so overwhelmed with how rich you are, that you couldn't care less about anything else.

It's like our car. Sometimes it needs an alignment, and we don't even know it.

- We don't feel the front tires pulling.
- We don't feel any shimmy
- You don't always see it.

But one way to check and see if you need an alignment is to check the tires.

- They can check for excess wear and tear
- They can check for uneven wear

Determine that you don't have a tire problem per se, but an alignment problem that is the cause. And some of you today are looking at your lives and seeing your tread worn bare and your tires worn out way too soon.

Many are seeing more spiritual defeat than victory.

We are struggling with the day-to-day contentment of life and so every month or two we attempt to fix it by changing our spiritual tires.

What you need however is an alignment.

No matter how many new tires you put on the car, unless you get your alignment fixed – they are just going to wear out too soon again.

² Lonnie Erwin, First Baptist Church, Quinlan, TX

Reflect and Respond

- Some of you are not content with your marriages and you think you need to change tires – but you really have an alignment problem.
- Some of you are not content with some of the things that go on in this church and you think you need to change tires - but you really have an alignment problem.
- Some of you are not content with your life in general and think you need to change tires, and maybe even get new wheels - but you really have an alignment problem.

- *Lean on His provision – The Lord is my helper*
- *Learn His Promises*
- *Love His Person*