

Week 1: What is Christian Contentment?

NCAC Adult Sunday School

September 10, 2023

THE TREASURE OF CONTENTMENT

"Imagine you just won the most extraordinary sweepstakes prize ever...The prize is a two-week all-expense paid trip anywhere in the world. You will stay at the most expensive five-star hotels, eat the highest quality food...You will see the most spectacular scenery, drive the most expensive cars...The trip will have the best of everything and will cater to your every whim. **But here's the catch: You would have to agree to be continually discontent at every moment of the trip...**

"Conversely, suppose a different offer were made to you, this one by your Heavenly Father. He is offering a painful trial of suffering. You will be publicly beaten, imprisoned in a gloomy dungeon with your feet in stocks. You will be deprived of food, water, medical care, and even light. Surrounding you will be other suffering prisoners and the stench of human bodily fluids...**But, you will also be filled with such a supernatural contentment through the presence of God that you will later remember it as one of the sweetest moments of your life.**" (Davis, *The Power of Christian Contentment*, pp. 12-13)

What draws you to each offer, and why would you choose one over the other?

When is discontentment sinful?

What are some other sins that may accompany discontentment?

Discontentment has always been an issue for humanity, but what are some factors in our current environment that especially fuel discontentment?

Course Goal: To better understand and more consistently display Christian contentment so that:

- God will be glorified in our daily lives
- We will be more joyful
- We will be an encouragement to other believers
- Those watching us will be attracted to Jesus

Recommended Books on Contentment:

- *The Power of Christian Contentment: Finder Deeper, Richer, Christ-centered Joy* by Andrew M. Davis (Baker Books, 2019)
- *Chasing Contentment: Trusting God in a Discontented Age* by Erik Raymond (Crossway, 2017)
- *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* by Jeremiah Burroughs (First Published 1648)

Recommended Bible Study on Contentment:

Contentment: Healing the Hunger of Our Hearts by Anne Woodcock (Good Book Company, 2008)

Tentative Outline:

- September 10—What is Christian contentment?
- September 17—How do we find contentment?
- September 24—Video: David Platt sermon on “The Secret of Contentment”
- October 1—Why is contentment so valuable and discontentment so grievous?
- October 8—How do we maintain contentment in both suffering and abundance?
- October 15—What’s the difference between contentment and complacency?

WHY IS CONTENTMENT SO ELUSIVE?

“Contentment is the greatest treasure.” (*Lao Tzu, founder of Taoism*)

“Contentment is an inexhaustible treasure.” (*Muhammed, founder of Islam*)

“Contentment is the greatest wealth.” (*Siddhartha Gautama, founder of Buddhism*)

As you look around, what evidence do you see that the pursuit of contentment is commonplace?

Why do so few find it?

“In a study conducted by Boston College, researchers talked with people whose fortunes exceeded \$25 million. The goal of the study was to get the rich to speak candidly about their lives. According to the study, ‘The respondents turn out to be a generally dissatisfied lot, whose money has contributed to deep anxieties involving love, work, and family. Indeed, they are frequently dissatisfied even with their sizable fortunes. Most of them still do not consider themselves financially secure; for that, they say, they would require on average one-quarter more wealth than they currently possess.’” (Raymond, *Chasing Contentment*, pp. 67-68)

"Some cultural observers have noted a growing phenomenon called fear of missing out (FOMO). With so much information at our fingertips we become restless wondering what our friends are doing, whether we have any emails, what is happening in politics—anything other than what we are doing at the moment. FOMO may explain our constant connectedness, but discontentment explains FOMO. Discontent comes because we are restless, unhappy, unsatisfied, and curious. It seems that within a few decades of technological development, many can scarcely engage in the menial tasks of life for very long without checking their phones. **It's as if we're saying, 'I have learned in whatever situation I am in to be discontent.'**" (*Raymond, Chasing Contentment, p. 22*)

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH ABOUT CONTENTMENT?

Paul was in prison, and the church in Philippi sent him a financial gift. After receiving this gift, Paul wrote the following to the church in Philippi:

¹⁰ I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. ¹¹ Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (Phil. 4:10-13)

From what Paul says here, what do we learn about Christian contentment?

*"Keep your life free from love of money, and **be content with what you have**, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'" (Hebrews 13:5)*

What does Hebrews 13:5 add to our understanding of Christian contentment?

⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. ⁹ Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. (1 Timothy 6:6-9)

What additional insights does this passage add to our understanding of Christian contentment?

²⁴ Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸ And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches." (2 Corinthians 11:24-28)

How might 2 Corinthians 11:24-28 correct some possible misconceptions of Christian contentment?

"Christian contentment does not mean that we passively accept afflicting circumstances, making no effort to improve our situation. Neither does it mean laying down for injustice in this world." (Davis, The Power of Christian Contentment, p. 26)

"Because [contentment] is commanded, we are obligated to do it. Actually, learning the secret of contentment is the mark of a fully mature Christian, but even a new believer should immediately pursue it." (Burroughs, The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment)

"It is the duty of all Christians to strive after contentment every single day for the rest of their lives on earth. We owe this to Christ. A convicting question stands over all our moments of complaining discontent: **Has Christ, crucified and resurrected on your behalf, done enough to make you content today...or must he do a little more?**" (Davis, The Power of Christian Contentment, p. 40)

HOMEWORK: Ask those close to you if they think you often complain. Pay attention to what you talk about. Take note of what you think about. Consider what motivates your times of discontent. How are you doing at embracing God's goodness and sufficiency in both good and bad times?