

Week 2: How Do We Find Contentment?

NCAC Adult Sunday School

September 17, 2023

THE TREASURE OF CONTENTMENT

Take a moment and write down areas of your life where you feel some discontentment or times in which you tend to experience discontentment. What do your answers reveal about what you believe?

LAST WEEK

- The goal of this course is to more consistently display Christian contentment so that God is glorified, we become more joyful, and we are an encouragement and inspiration to others.
- We all pursue contentment, but not many find it since we so often seek contentment in things that will ultimately not satisfy us—a tendency fueled by many aspects of modern society.
- In **Philippians 4:10-13**, Paul said, he “learned in whatever situation I am in to be content,” telling us that it *is* possible to be content in all circumstances—both good and bad.
- In **Hebrews 13:5** we saw that contentment is commanded and that we can fight for contentment through remembering the promises of God—specifically that God will always be with us.
- **1 Timothy 6:6-9** speaks to the value of contentment, reminding us that “godliness with contentment is great gain,” while warning us that a lack of contentment can lead to great peril.
- Yet, **2 Corinthians 11:24-28** reveals that contentment does not mean we deny the reality of hardship, don’t care about anything, or fail to work at making life better for ourselves or others.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

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

HOW MIGHT WE DEFINE CHRISTIAN CONTENTMENT?

- Burroughs says: “Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God’s wise and fatherly disposal at every condition.”
- Raymond condensed that definition to: “Contentment is the inward, gracious, quiet spirit that joyfully rests in God’s providence.” (*Raymond, Chasing Contentment, p. 23*)
- Davis puts it this way: “Christian contentment is finding delight in God’s wise plan for my life and humbly allowing him to direct me in it.” (*Davis, The Power of Christian Contentment, p. 18*)

“...frame of spirit...”

Christian contentment is the result of a particular attitude arising from a biblical way of looking at life. Paul speaks to this when he says in Philippians 4:11, *“I have **learned** in whatever situation I am to be content.”* Paul also reminds us of the importance of our mindset in Romans 12:2 when he says, *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind....”*

“...sweet...”

True contentment is not only pleasant to the person who has it, but it also attractive to others. Having contentment in all circumstances can inspire others to “ask you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). No one longs to be around someone who is always bitter and cranky or who is prone to grumble and complain, but when we display contentment even when our situation is difficult or challenging, we become lights in a dark world.

“...inward...”

After being attacked, stripped, beaten, and thrown in a dungeon Acts 16:25 tells us that, *“About midnight Paul and Silas were **praying and singing hymns** to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.”* In the midst of great hardship, Paul and Silas were able to display contentedness, demonstrating that Christian contentment is not dependent on our outward circumstances; rather, Christian contentedness flows from a heart that is satisfied in God above all else.

“...quiet...”

It is not wrong to seek help, work towards change, or make pleas to God, but a content heart shows itself by not grumbling or complaining, so that even in the midst of hard times, one is able to rest in God, just as Paul told the Philippians that after making their requests *“known to God,”* they should experience the *“**peace of God, which surpasses all understanding**”* (Philippians 4:6-7).

“...gracious...”

When Burroughs and Raymond speak of contentment being “gracious,” they mean it is the result of God’s grace in our lives, evident in how Paul spoke of the Philippians finding a *“peace of God, which surpasses all understanding”* (Phil. 4:7). Contentment that results because of favorable circumstances or contentment that results because of apathy is *not* Christian contentment.

“...joyfully rests in God’s providence...”

The doctrine of providence teaches there is no such thing as chance or luck. Rather, an all-wise, loving, powerful God is upholding, governing, and orchestrating all things according to His good purpose at all times. Burroughs asserts that Christian contentment comes from trusting in God’s “fatherly disposal at every condition.”

WAYS TO FIGHT FOR CONTENTMENT

1. Learn to joyfully rest in God's providence. As Andrew Davis says, "Christian contentment is finding delight in God's wise plan for my life and humbly allowing him to direct me in it." (*Davis, The Power of Christian Contentment, p. 18*)

"He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power." (Hebrews 1:3; See also Colossians 1:17)

"God's providence is his almighty and ever present power, whereby, as with his hand, he still upholds heaven and earth and all creatures, and so governs them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, food and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, indeed, all things, come to us not by chance but by his fatherly hand." (*Heidelberg Catechism, 1563*)

How should the doctrine of Providence help to create contentment in us?

What do we need to believe about God in order for this to happen?

2. Reorder your desires so that you desire God and His will for you above all else. In ourselves, we are painfully off in our determination of what will truly satisfy. We must learn to see past the "shiny wrappers" of this world and recognize that true and lasting contentment is found only in Christ.

"Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart." (Psalm 37:4)

What does this verse mean? How might it be misunderstood?

3. Remind yourself of what you truly deserve. "There is an inherent humility in Christian contentment and a basic arrogance in discontentment...Many of us Christians do not feel the magnitude of [our] debt...Paradoxically, studying the horrors of hell can be a gateway to a resilient joy 'in any and every circumstance'...[as] we realize that we deserve to be in hell and instead are here on earth." (*Davis, The Power of Christian Contentment, p. 71*)

Mark Dever said, "Anything less than hell is dancing time for Christians." How does this relate to your contentment? Do you believe this?

Struggling to recognize sin in your life? Try praying this prayer: "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." (*Psalm 139:23-24*)

4. Embrace the Absolute Necessity of Suffering. Suffering is a key means that God uses for our growth. "We must conquer the natural desire for a painless life if we are going to grow in contentment and advance the kingdom of God in a hostile world." (Davis, *The Power of Christian Contentment*, p. 3)

"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." (James 1:2-4)

How have you seen suffering lead to Christlikeness? What has helped you overcome resistance to suffering? How might God use some of your current sufferings to help you grow in Christlikeness?

5. Do the "Duty of Circumstance." Burroughs encourages us to ask in every situation, "What does God want me to do here and now to put the glory of Christ and the sweetness of the Gospel on display?"

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:14-16)

Consider some areas where you are prone to feel discontent. How might a change in attitude put the glory of Christ and the sweetness of the Gospel on display?

6. Embrace that life is a mist. The Bible makes clear that our present sufferings are infinitely insignificant compared to the eternity of glory that awaits us (2 Cor. 4:17; Rom. 8:18), and that the more we suffer for God's glory now, the greater our capacity will be to enjoy heaven (Matt. 5:12).

*"Just imagine sharing a room in a nice hotel with a friend on a business trip in Chicago. After checking in and putting his luggage down in your room, he says he has an important errand to run. You go with him and are shocked when he walks into a home-decorating store and begins picking out carpets, drapes, framed pictures, and other accessories. You ask him what in the world he's doing, and he says, 'I'm decorating our room! It was too modern for my taste.' You look at him like he's crazy. 'We're only staying for two nights!' To a certain extent the same is true for us as Christians: We're just passing through." (Davis, *The Power of Christian Contentment*, p. 78)*

How have you found this truth to foster a sense of contentment in you?

What else have you found helpful in fighting for contentment?