

940501PM Contentment-2

BIBLICAL CONTENTMENT

PHIL. 4:11-12

PART TWO

1. The Scriptures Define Contentment

What does the Bible have to say about CONTENTMENT?

First, the Bible teaches that it is a way of life that must be learned.

- Look at Philippians 4:11-12.
- As Swindoll says, "It's not a gift from heaven".¹
- It is also not merely being complacent. That is a self-satisfaction and nonchalance about life that ignores the responsibilities and potential difficulties around.
- Complacency has no place in a true Christian's life. Listen to Paul in 3:12-14. Not complacent, but contentedly pressing on toward God. A life focused on His objectives not mine.

Second, you don't need money to be content. In fact, money is one of the things that can really mess up contentment. Look at the verses we closed with last time in I Timothy 6. In brief the truth of all these verses may be distilled in one sentence Swindoll likes to use:

*"it means to be free from inner turmoil, satisfied with one's material and financial state, and in possession of a sense of peace regardless of one's circumstances or feelings."*²

Thirdly, the Bible says that contentment isn't in the good life, the fast life or even the simple life. America spent the 70's finding the secret isn't the fast life, the 80's that it isn't in the good life and now the 90's that it isn't even the simple life. It's only in a person.

Read three illustrations from Farrar..³ (Farrar, p. 189-90)

People everywhere are looking for satisfaction and contentment. In the eighties it was believed contentment would come with living the good life. Contentment would come if you could afford a Rolex instead of a Timex, if you got into a BMW instead of a Honda. But people began to realize that contentment can't be found by acquiring more things. As a result, there

¹ Swindoll, p. 99.

² Ibid.

³ Farrar, *Better Homes and Jungles*, p.189-90.

seems to be a national turn among baby-boomers back to the simple life. At least that's the trend that *Time* magazine is noticing.

The problem is that contentment can't be found in the simple life, either. Maybe that's what Americans will spend the nineties searching for. They will be looking for contentment in the simple life because they couldn't find it in the "good" life. But the problem is that contentment *cannot* be found without knowing the Shepherd. Jesus Christ is the door to contentment, and without Him you can't get there from here.

Contentment is the byproduct of following the Shepherd. It is experiencing the inner-peace that only He can provide. It is knowing He will promote you at the right time. Contentment is the sense of satisfaction that comes to a husband and wife as they emulate the provision and care of the Shepherd to their own children. Contentment comes from serving Christ instead of money and from providing not only financially for your family, but emotionally, morally and spiritually.

Our next portion says only by knowing the Shepherd can we truly rest content. Psalm 23:6. It comes by seeing life as God does.

Farrar quote on lenses⁴

NORMAL -----CLOSEUP
35 -----WIDE -----TELEPHOTO

Finally, What can be the result of living by the Bible's definition of contentment? Let's look at just three:

1. If you are content, you can enjoy the present rather than being anxious about the future. Mt 6:25
2. If you are content, you can be liberated to truly enjoy the successes of others around you without envy. Ps 37:7
3. If you are content, you will be able to let the Lord build a true sense of thankfulness about everything. I TH5:18

CONTENTMENT avoids:

- the desire for things more than God
- the desire for pleasure more than godliness

⁴ Ibid.

- the longing for more things than for Him who is to be all in all
- the desire for what others have when they have more or better things or situations than we have
- and the constant thoughts about things over the spiritual world

Each of these is a warning of a spiritual ill health called DISCONTENTMENT. Listen to Packer's insightful analysis.⁵

“Discontent will destroy your peace, rob you of joy, make you miserable, spoil your witness,” warns Packer. “We dishonor God if we proclaim a Savior who satisfies and then go around discontent.”

The advantages of contentment, on the other hand, are many: freedom, gratitude, rest, peace -- all components of health. They who are content do not have to worry about the latest styles or what to wear tomorrow. They can rejoice in their neighbor's good fortune without having to feel inferior. They do not fret with wrinkles or graying because they accept what comes. They do not have to worry how they might buy this or that because they have no desire for this or that. They are not consumed with how to get out of debt because they have no debt. They have time for gratitude even in small things. They have time for relationships because possessions and the bank do not own them.

So the Bible defines it...

2. God endorses Contentment

Contentment is not optional.

THE SECRET⁶

Contentment is not only a good idea, it is our duty. If God recommends something, we *ought* to do it. If God requires something, we *must* do it. As J.I. Packer has emphasized, contentment is both *commended*, I Timothy 6:6 (“Godliness with contentment is great gain”) and *commanded*, Hebrews 13:5 (“Be content with what you have”).

Such a forceful endorsement by the Almighty should make contentment a prominent concern for each of us. Instead, we make it a secret concealed by our indifference to it. When the Apostle Paul wrote, “I have learned the *secret* of being content,” his use of the word secret was intentional. Those things we expect to bring contentment surprisingly do not. We cannot

⁵ Packer as quoted by Swenson, p.194-5.

⁶ Swenson, p.186-87.

depend upon it to fall into place through the progressive evolving of civilization, for contentment arises from a different source.

Most of us do not know how to uncover this secret and have never seriously tried. Our quest is usually not for *contentment* but for *more*. This quest brings us into an immense maze, where before us lie dozens of avenues. Some are wide, luxurious, downhill, and tempting, and we see a rush of our friends entering them. They lead to beautiful houses, comfortable cars, exotic vacations, and affluence. Other avenues, equally popular, lead to prestigious colleges, distinguished jobs, important friends, and power. Still others direct us to beautiful spouses, beautiful children, deep tans, and popularity.

All the while, off to one side, courses a narrow uphill road, unadorned and unpopular. It is dusty from its sparse use and lonely from lack of travelers. The sole treasure at its end is an elusive commodity called "godliness with contentment."

Godliness is an attitude whereby what we want is to please God.

Contentment, explains J.I. Packer, "is essentially a matter of accepting from God's hand what He sends because we know that He is good and therefore it is good."

Contentment is the freedom that comes when prosperity or poverty do not matter; to accept what we have and "to want but little," as Thoreau advised. The more we choose contentment, the more God sets us free. The more He sets us free, the more we choose contentment.

3. Christ Models Contentment

For this last point open with me to the great passage on Christ's steps downward. Philippians 2:5 is the start.

Paul records seven clear steps down that can make a framework for us. Contentment if it can be learned is best learned from the only perfect man who ever lived.

Phil. 2:5-6
Descend with Christ.

THE PROSPERITY LADDER⁷

⁷ Swenson, p.188.

Another erroneous measure of contentment is the prosperity ladder. Most of us look “up the ladder” and notice that the wealthy have more than we do. This, of course, strikes a near fatal blow at one’s contentment. If, instead, we reversed our gaze and looked down the ladder, our gratitude would thrive and opportunities for sharing would abound.

The pettiness of my own sources of discontent would be amusing were I not so repentant about them. I have been known to grumble when our house temperature drops to sixty degrees, yet there are untold millions in the world who do not have shelter. I have been known to complain if the day is rainy, yet a large segment of the world’s land is shriveling up in drought. I have been known to groan if I miss my dinner, yet thousands who go to sleep tonight without food will not awaken in the morning. Christ came to save me from sin -- not from sixty-degree homes, rainy weather, and delayed dinners.

This relativism, where the grass is greener on your neighbor’s lawn, can be remedied, but first it must be confessed. We need to quit staring at those who have more than we do. We need to override the set-point by spiritual maturity, to look down rather than up the ladder, and to fix our contentment on godliness rather than relativism. It helps immeasurably if we are surrounded by a community of like-minded friends rather than a society where envy has been normalized.

Seven Clear Steps Down That Can Make A Framework For Us

1. Christ UNGRASPED Himself in v. 6.
2. He EMPTIED Himself in v. 7.
3. He SERVED Himself in v. 7.
4. He HUMBLLED Himself in v. 8.
5. He OBEYED the Father in v. 8.
6. He RECEIVED all from the Father in v. 9.
7. He GLORIFIED the Father in v. 12