



Sunday June 23, 2019

CONTENTMENT- THE NEEDED VIRTUE

Introduction:

Contentment is an elusive pursuit. We chase after things that we think may make us happy only to find that we need more and better after every chase. The quest is better and what is next. We find ourselves rarely content, envious of those things and experiences we have not attained or accumulated.

Our message today is on an important virtue of our Christian living and faith - contentment, a needed virtue that seems forgotten. We live in a time of rampant discontentment. Virtually everywhere we turn we are told we need something more to make us happy; that what we have is not good enough, that we need – or rather deserve and have a right to – bigger, better, more than we now have.

We also at times interpret that being in a situation that is difficult or incomplete is not in God's will, so we go from job to job, marriage to marriage, relationship to relationship, church to church, cause to cause, from one thing to another, accumulating more stuff, seeking this elusive happiness of which we have been told that we have a right and entitlement.

As people of God, when we live in contentment as God desires, we live to unfold His glory and faithfulness.

Defining contentment

For a Christian it is an **innermost assurance** in the **sovereignty and goodness of God** that produces joy, peace and thanksgiving **regardless of outside circumstances**

Contentment is **innermost**, meaning it is inward. It is something that springs from deep within us and not that which comes from that which is outside of us. The truth is that contentment springs from the inside and goes to the outside, sourced inward and works outward.

Example: Paul and Silas in prison were singing songs of praise and joy which shows that their contentment didn't come from their circumstance of being in prison but came from within their hearts.

It is an **assurance** and not a pretence or a show of a claim that is not felt in the depth of the inner man.

Contentment is **rooted in who God** is. It is an act of trust and faith, placing our hope in a sovereign and a good God. There is a true principle that whatever we hope in is what we are trusting in. Examples- we hope in our abilities or our knowledge to get us a job, or we hope in our beauty and our appearances to get a good spouse, or we hope in our money to get a house, or hope in our children to secure our future. We trust in false gods- the things that we think would make us happy. There is a God sized vacuum in all of His creation that can only be fulfilled by an eternal God. All other things, though they are good are only temporary. So, the more we know who God is, the more satisfied our longings will be

Contentment is **fitting our heart** to our circumstances.

Pursuing contentment



1. Exhibits of hope

Our hope matters to the world that is watching, we are like zoo exhibits being watched how we perform/ how we respond to the issues and challenges of life

1 Peter 3.15 Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you

Be a person of hope because we all walk through this broken existence.

Are we spectacles of His glory? Are we showing that we are hard pressed but not crushed? Burnt but not consumed? It speaks volumes about who we serve.

As Christians, we are the living example of hope in Christ.

When we are not satisfied with what the Lord provides, then our trust and faith in God as a living example to others fails

2. Encouragers in faith – the hope that we have encourages other believers

1 Thess 3: 7-9

Therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith. 8 For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord. For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God

Paul when he wrote to the Thessalonians after Timothy brings back report of the church there had heard that they were suffering for their faith just as he was and Paul was concerned about how they were doing and this is what he writes.

Paul heard that their faith was strong in the midst of the trials and he encouraged them for that.

Contentment can pass on from one to the other. When we live lives of peace and gratitude before our brothers and sisters, it encourages them to do the same as well.

3. Overflowers of joy

John 15:11

“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.

It is God’s desire to have us be thankful, joyful and content people. Just before Jesus went to the cross, He took the time to tell his disciples many things about Himself so that their joy would not be lost or stolen through what was going to happen. He reveals that He is the Truth, the Way and the Life, his promise of the Holy Spirit, the lasting peace that He offers and our life in Him by being the branches of the Vine. Jesus intended that the disciples not be disheartened but encouraged with the promises He was leaving with them before He went to the cross- Jesus pointed out that nothing in the current world system could give them the full joy like abiding in who He is. Jesus desires that our joy is not in the temporary things in life, but in the knowledge of who He is.

Thus when we live out of contentment, we in turn give Him praise and glory which increases our joy.

Understanding contentment:



1. Contentment is a command

Hebrews 13.5 Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

This verse implies a command: for Christian living "Be content with what you have." The bible exhorts believers to have a disposition or a character free from coveting anything that belongs to someone else or have a conduct that is free from greed, avarice, lust or any craving for earthly possessions. On the flipside it would mean, to grumble about our circumstances is to challenge the love and goodness of our heavenly Father. To be discontented implies that He has not provided us with what we need.

Example: Discontentment was the sin of Israel in the wilderness. God had just miraculously delivered them from slavery in Egypt and He was miraculously meeting their needs, yet they grumbled about their hardships and wanted to return to Egypt despite the many times God commands them to remember the time of deliverance. (Exodus 13.3 And Moses said to the people: "Remember this day in which you went out of Egypt, out of the house of [a]bondage; for by strength of hand the Lord brought you out of this place.)

2. Contentment is the matter of the heart

Jude 15,16

Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, 15 to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."
16 These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts;

Jude is speaking about God's judgment that will come upon the ungodly and the ungodly mentioned here are the grumblers and the complainers. **Complaining and discontentment in other words is a sin that calls for judgment.**

Complaining **reveals the inward condition of our hearts.** Coveting usually happens in secret-happening in the mind and your heart. Example if one stole from their neighbour he would know, but if he coveted it, the neighbour would know nothing about it. This deals right into the attitude of the heart, something that God is very concerned about.

The holiness that God call us for is more than just right behaviour but an upright heart.

Discontentment often has something to say about the sin we harbour in and not really our circumstances. Israel's attitude is a warning against the great sin of complaining. Although they complained to Moses, they were really grumbling against God. By saying that it would have been better for God to let them die back in Egypt, they were really saying that they wished they had never been saved.

3. Contentment is refusing to resent

Genesis 50: 19,20

Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? 20 But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.



Real contentment comes when we choose not to resent

If we don't choose to resist and refuse resentment then we are locked inside of our mind's own interpretation. The choice is to live in contentment or in resentment. We can choose how to interpret a situation – that which either keeps us in the bondage of resentment or in the freedom of contentment

Example: Joseph had a choice to live in the prison of resentment or live free when he met with his brothers.

4. Contentment is not innate but learnt

Phil 4.12

I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want

Like every Christian virtue, contentment is something that must be learned, which means it is something we must be taught. This virtue is so elusive and so rare that Paul called it a "secret". The word used by Paul is *muelo*. It means "to learn a secret, a mystery; to be initiated into a secret".

Paul says I have learned to be content- **contentment is a grace that he learned over time**. It was a process. The implication of this word 'learned' suggests that it was not like this for the apostle. It was over a period of time, which suggests it wasn't quickly neither was it easily, but was over time and through multiple situations gradually as he walked with God

Learning to be content

Contentment is not a natural propensity of man. Weeds grow just as quickly in a fertile land. So does covetousness, discontent, and murmuring. These are as natural to man as weeds to the soil. There is no need to sow thistles and brambles; they come up naturally enough, because they are indigenous to earth.

So also there is no need to teach men to complain. But just like the crop must be cultivated, contentment must be cultivated. It will not grow in us by nature; it is the new nature alone that can produce it, and even then we must be specially careful and watchful that we maintain and cultivate the grace which God has sown in it.

Philippians 4:11 – 13

Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: 12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

4 "I" statements: indicative of his personal learning and testimony

I know how to be abased I know how to abound- Paul talks about extreme circumstances here- the word abased refers to a state of humiliation or of being bought low or of a state of being depressed, where there is nothing left of himself.



The word abound- which refers to have excess, or be superfluous, to be the better, to increase, to excel. Paul, is also referring to those in between the spectrum. These circumstances could refer to many things- a state of fulfilment or a state of brokenness, a state of having plenty to a state of needing to find our next meal, a state of enriching relationships and a state of strife and discord, a time of fullness and a time of emptiness. Paul emphasises that he has been through this.

I have learned to be content- Through these verses, we see Paul shares his personal testimony/ experience of what he has been through.

A. Savour every blessing

Phil 4.8

whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

Shows us that God has given us the ability to choose where we can put our focus on, what we focus our attention to.

It is a deliberate act to bring to mind that which is good, “think about those things”.

This is consistent with other scripture - Set your mind on things above (Col3. 2) , where you choose to fix you mind will make a radical difference in what you are experiencing in your heart.

Cultivate the habit of making more of your joys than more of your sorrows- this is to be done not just in thinking, do it in speaking and in praying (Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, **with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;** 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.)

The way in which the Holy Spirit impresses your heart when you call to mind or savor the blessing is like this - when there is a suffering or a want, you make less of the suffering than the mercy that comes into your life. But the devil does it the other way, his tone is always to minimise the weight of the blessing minimise the value of the good. and draw attention to that which is not right thereby sowing discontent.

Analogy: when you listen to music, you choose how it sounds- you tun up the treble or the base- it sounds different. So turn up the mercies in your life and focus less on the want or the hardships

NOTE: This does not mean that as a Christian, there needs to be pretense regarding the sorrows in life. Sufferings are real that can leave one being overwhelmed. God sees and helps us in our realities. Put these anxieties alongside other areas of life where there is a blessing.

Example: having a hard-pressed job but thanking God for the financial comfort it gives. Struggling in the marriage but having a good support system in friends, facing persecution for faith but having a good life group.

B. Affirm the sufficiency of Christ

Phil 4.13



I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me

Verse 12 talks about how he knows what it is to be full or in hunger and to abound or be in need and suggests that there is a secret to this learning. The secret that he reveals is to do all things through the strength offered to us in Christ.

Paul connects the secret of contentment with the strength that He receives from Christ.

When we affirm that Christ is all sufficient and all that we need, then contentment begins to take root.

Note: Contentment does not mean that you are indifferent to your circumstances

it is an error to think that we should resign to or give up trying to make things better. We wrongly think that being content is to remove any motivation to change our current situation. The Scripture below refers to the time that Paul pleaded to the Lord to remove the thorn in his flesh. Paul just doesn't accept it but does all he can to come to God in prayer and he did what he could to give himself to three occasions where he came before the Lord asking to be free from this. God answers him in this way

2 Cor 12.9

My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.

Notice that it is the same as Phil 4. 13- it is Christ's grace, his strength and His power. Paul would have loved to change this and he did whatever he could. Through this he finds contentment in the grace and strength of the Lord.

There is an overflow of strength and grace made available that matches our need and our problems.

Thus, **Contentment does not mean that you are indifferent to your circumstances, it means you are not controlled by your circumstances.**

C. Live in the fear of the Lord

1 Timothy 6.6

"Godliness with contentment is great gain.

True Contentment is in a God centered life

Paul addresses Timothy and tells him that in the church there were men distorting the truth. Their teachings about godliness contradicted those things that Jesus had taught. In fact, according to **1 Timothy 6:5 they were actually saying that godliness would help one get rich.** Paul counters this teaching and tells him that great gain comes when there is godliness with contentment.

Godliness is a **God centered life or a character that comes as a result of reverence for God.**

It does not grow not through a process but **through the person of Jesus Christ.** Paul says that when you find joy in what God has given you (contentment) alongside living a life centred around God, around God, you have great gain and are richer and wealthier than having worldly possessions.

Phil 1:21

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain



If we want to feel as Paul did, the contentment he had, then we need to live as Paul lived.

He lived at all times in the fear and reverence of the Lord.

Phil 1: 21 says For me to live is Christ and to die is gain. What do we put in there- for me to live is -----? Family, work, ministry, pleasure, sport, music, whatever you put on that blank the rest of the sentence will continue as, to die is loss. You lose whatever you insert in the blank. The only way to die is gain is to live in Christ.

Could it be possible that the reason there are so many discontent Christians is that there are many people who claims Jesus is their Saviour but don't have the Lord become the supremacy of their lives and go by living a self-directed life.

There is no contentment other than the reign and rule of Christ in our lives and the reverence for Him

CONCLUSION:

Phil 2.7

but He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

Paul knew what it was to abound and to be in need yet His life was captivated by Jesus. Similarly, our experiences could be at the bottom and at the top. Yet none of our experiences could ever match to what Jesus went through. He was brought low, emptied himself and goes to the very lowest of low he took the place of a servant, left his majesty to face a brutal and shameful death.

To those who lose everything for Jesus gain everything from Him and abiding in His presence is the secret to our contentment